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Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8294th meeting
Tuesday, 26 June 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Nebenzia/Mr. Safronkov	(Russian Federation)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Djédjé
	Equatorial Guinea	Mrs. Mele Colifa
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Duclos
	Poland	Mr. Lewicki
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Ms. Tachco

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2018/539)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2018/539)

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Japan, Pakistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan; Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; and Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Gerton Van Den Akker, representative of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/539, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Yamamoto: Afghanistan is experiencing a politically dynamic period. Ten days ago, we witnessed an extraordinary series of events in Afghanistan that demonstrated both the possibilities for peace and the enduring structural obstacles. On 7 June, President Ghani declared a unilateral ceasefire for the period 12-19 June to commemorate the Eid festivities that conclude the month of Ramadan. Two days later, the Taliban announced its own unilateral ceasefire, covering 15-17 June. During these overlapping three days, both sides honoured their respective ceasefires for the first time in the past 17 years of conflict. Many Afghans reacted with jubilation. Local Government authorities invited members of the Taliban to lay down their arms and enter cities to visit their families; some Afghan soldiers visited Taliban-controlled areas. Social media was inundated with photos of Taliban fighters embracing Afghan security forces.

President Ghani then proposed to extend the ceasefire — a proposal endorsed by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and many members of the international community. The Taliban, unfortunately, recommitted themselves to battle. I regret deeply that the Taliban did not take up the opportunity to cease fighting and reduce violence. Their decision to fight will only increase the suffering of civilians.

It is nonetheless worth taking stock of how much has changed this year alone on the question of peace in Afghanistan. The National Unity Government's offer of peace talks without preconditions, made during the Kabul Process conference on 28 February, created a new reality. Even though the Taliban did not formally respond to the offer, a number of other developments reinforced it. First, we saw an unprecedented grass-roots movement. Beginning in March, ordinary Afghan people began setting up tents in around 20 of the 34 provinces, where they protested for peace. In early June, a group of 2,000 religious scholars met in Kabul. They pronounced suicide bombings to be against the teaching of Islam and called for a ceasefire and for peace talks to begin. At the beginning of Ramadan, one of the first groups to set up a peace tent began a 500-kilometre march from Helmand to Kabul, stopping along the way to raise support for their call for a ceasefire and talks and reaching Kabul last week. Their demand to end the conflict is addressed to every party to the conflict. The Afghan people's genuine demand for peace, coming from the bottom of their hearts, must not be ignored.

We should ask ourselves two questions. What have we learned from these events for peace and how do we respond? What we have learned is that both the Afghan Government and the Taliban have command and control over their troops. Afghans, including Taliban fighters, clearly want peace. It is also clear that President Ghani is taking courageous steps to seek peace through talks.

How do we respond? In returning to the battlefield, the Taliban insist that its goal is to end the presence

of foreign forces in Afghanistan. Therefore, it shuns direct talks with the Afghan Government. However, any future political settlement in Afghanistan must take into account the concerns of all Afghans. The Afghans must talk among themselves to end the conflict and to decide on the future. That clearly requires the Taliban to have direct talks with the Afghan Government. We believe that the issue of international forces will inevitably be taken up in the comprehensive context of peace talks, which will determine the future political order for all Afghans. I should like to note here that regional efforts to counter terrorism have been receiving more attention, with some important international conferences organized by Tajikistan and the Office of Counter-Terrorism.

Preparations are now under way in earnest for parliamentary elections in October and presidential elections planned for spring of next year. Since mid-April, over 7 million people have registered to vote. This is the first time since 2003 that Afghanistan is conducting a complete registration of voters for both parliamentary and presidential elections. The goal is a single, national voter registry that can produce accurate lists based on polling stations. When achieved, it is expected to significantly reduce fraud.

The registration of over 7 million voters is a positive achievement under difficult circumstances, particularly insecurity. On closer scrutiny, however, there remains cause for concern. First, in six provinces, less than 35 per cent of the estimated eligible voters were registered. Secondly, registration within provinces is uneven, with certain areas being prevented from registering for logistical or security reasons. Given Afghanistan's multi-ethnic composition, the exclusion of those communities could lead to the election results being contested. Such disparities have also affected the nomination of candidates.

This time, elections in Afghanistan are being conducted as a fully Afghan-led and-owned process. All Afghans share responsibility for transparent and inclusive elections. The Independent Election Commission has the primary responsibility. All Commissioners must become fully aware of the lofty responsibilities they shoulder for the future of Afghanistan — to strengthen the foundation of the democratic political process and to demonstrate that Afghanistan is determined and ready to take on the challenges to bring about an independent, sovereign State that can stand on its own feet.

Political parties and political leaders need to be fully aware that they also carry a large part of the responsibility for credible elections. Rather than simply criticizing the process, they must be actively engaged to make elections truly Afghan-owned.

We welcome the commitment of civil society to monitor voting, counting, tabulating, and transmission of results at every polling station. The international community must support their monitoring activities. The United Nations has 23 international experts currently working with the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission, as well as their respective secretariats, and additional technical advisers are being recruited. UNAMA will do all it can alongside the international community to assist Afghan efforts to bring about transparent, inclusive and credible Afghan-owned elections.

The ministerial conference on Afghanistan in Geneva, hosted by the United Nations and co-chaired by the Government of Afghanistan, will be held on 28 November. The conference comes at the mid-point of the transformation decade during which the country transitions from dependence on the international community to self-reliance. The conference will focus on three areas. The first is the extent to which the country is moving towards self-reliance and the effectiveness of aid. The second area is the remaining challenges, for example insecurity and job creation. Clearly, a safer country where the private sector can grow faster is key to creating employment. Finally, it will address the link between short-term humanitarian action and development cooperation. The link between peace and security, humanitarian action and development is a key theme for the United Nations, and the Geneva ministerial conference offers an opportunity to focus on that nexus.

In Geneva, we expect the Afghan side to report on its achievements in the areas of development, poverty reduction and reforms, and to outline concrete plans to address remaining challenges. In response, I count on Afghanistan's development partners to actively support the people and institutions of Afghanistan as they move the country forward. We are encouraged to see that the Afghan Government is already looking beyond the transformation decade, for example by working to increase regional connectivity and trade. Much has been achieved, but much remains to be done in the domains of peace, security and development. Geneva

affords us all this year's best chance to set in stone the road to a safer and better future.

Much of Afghanistan, in particular the north and the west, have been struck by drought more severe than anything experienced in almost a decade. Wheat production in 2017 was reported to be 57 per cent below the five-year average. The 2018 harvest is forecast to be even lower. The humanitarian response plan has been revised by the amount of $117 million up to the still modest total of $547 million in order to enable the United Nations to provide relief to affected populations and to complement the work of the Government to assist people in need.

While our attention has been focused on the larger political processes, it is important that we not lose sight of the critical issue of the protection of women's rights. UNAMA recently issued a report on the use of mediation to resolve criminal cases of violence against women. I was greatly disturbed by the findings. The report found that a majority of those cases were resolved through mediation instead of being tried in accordance with criminal laws. In many cases, such traditional means of resolution compounded the original violence. Women were left to suffer. Women who have been subjected to criminal violence must be able to assert their rights according to the law.

The key political events of peace and the elections are far from ensured. However, we are seeing unprecedented opportunities to make progress in seeking peace and in consolidating the political foundation for the future. Afghanistan's evolving development needs and the strategies to address them are being re-evaluated as part of the preparations for the Geneva conference. In other words, the coming months will present critical opportunities for the international community to seriously review and adjust the way in which it supports and assists Afghanistan in its efforts to bring about peace, democracy and self-reliance.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Fedotov.

Mr. Fedotov (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your successful presidency of the Security Council and on its convening of this very timely consideration of the issue of Afghanistan today in the Security Council. I also thank you for inviting me to this meeting.

(*spoke in English*)

When I last addressed the Security Council on the counter-narcotics challenges and responses in Afghanistan in December 2017 (see S/PV.8147), I highlighted the urgent need to step up international action. In half an hour, I will join the President of the General Assembly to launch the *World Drug Report 2018*, which is the flagship publication of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The findings of the report indicate that last year, the total global opium production increased by 65 per cent to the amount of 10,500 tons. That is the highest number recorded by UNODC since we started monitoring. Most of that opium originates in Afghanistan, where, as the Security Council is well aware, opium poppy cultivation and production have reached unprecedented levels.

That situation clearly has a high destabilizing potential for the country, the wider region and the international community. Last month, UNODC released a socioeconomic study that complements the annual *Afghanistan Opium Survey*. The study clearly underlines the multiple challenges to sustainable development, peace and security posed by opium. The linkages with terrorism and other forms of crime have also been widely acknowledged, including by the Council. Those problems require long-term engagement and solutions in order to achieve results.

Today, I am pleased to note that since December, we have seen some positive momentum with efforts to respond to that global threat. Nevertheless, many formidable challenges remain. Once again, I would like to highlight the importance of shared responsibility and international cooperation in addressing the many security, safety, development and health challenges posed by the situation. Unfortunately, the focus of the international community has shifted away from the priority of counter-narcotics in recent years. We cannot afford such inattention. Moreover, sustained resources are needed to address the situation.

In that context, UNODC has pursued efforts to advocate for renewed awareness and support and to strengthen regional and interregional dialogue and responses to opium trafficking. UNODC and the Afghan Ministry of Counter-Narcotics have worked together to reinvigorate the Afghan commitment to the issue, including in the broader context of the Kabul peacebuilding process. That includes UNODC support to the interministerial working group, led by

the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics, for the development of a counter-narcotics strategy with a strong regional cooperation component.

Furthermore, in close coordination with the Government of Afghanistan, UNODC has developed strategic actions to respond to the global threats of opiates in order to step up regional and interregional responses to counter the increases in opium cultivation and production and to address the related threats of crime, terrorism and corruption. Our efforts focus on four identified priorities: first, the need for a revitalized and strong Afghan lead in counter-narcotics action; secondly, the importance of comprehensive and balanced approaches, from the health sector to law enforcement, under the principle of shared responsibility and in line with the recommendations of the seventeenth special session of the General Assembly to consider the question of international cooperation against illicit production, supply, demand, trafficking and distribution of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances; thirdly, the need to target the nexus between drugs, crime and terrorism as a spoiler of the peace process; and, fourthly, the need to support Member States, especially in Central and West Asia, in strengthening mechanisms that contribute to preventing conflict and destabilization related to the opiate threat and the action of international terrorist groups based in the region and beyond. The strategy seeks to further enhance effective interagency coordination with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia.

For maximum effectiveness and efficiency, the strategy also aims to plug into existing coordination and governance mechanisms, such as the Paris Pact Initiative, the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan, the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Afghan Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, among many others.

The recent Paris Pact Policy Consultative Group Meeting in Vienna noted the following strategic and policy developments. UNODC remains fully engaged in supporting Afghanistan and the neighbouring countries in pursuing comprehensive counter-narcotics action. That includes alternative development, regional and interregional cooperation to deal with the illicit trafficking of drugs and precursors, as well as to intercept the financial flows, law enforcement capacity-building, and the scaling up of drug-use prevention and treatment services.

Looking ahead, the Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, to be held in Geneva in November, represents an opportunity to highlight the importance of counter-narcotics responses. I hope that we can count on the assistance of the Security Council to draw attention to the many threats to Afghanistan, the wider region and beyond posed by opiates and to the need for urgent and determined international action.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Fedotov for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Voronkov.

Mr. Voronkov: I would like to begin by thanking the Russian presidency of the Security Council and the members of the Council for this opportunity to speak about the challenges facing Afghanistan when it comes to preventing and countering terrorism.

Last month, when I briefed the Security Council on the outcomes of my mission to Iraq, together with Assistant Secretary-General Ms. Michèle Coninsx (see S/PV.8271), I started by expressing our solidarity with the victims of multiple terrorist attacks in many regions of the world, including in Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, the deadly violence continues across Afghanistan. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), there were 5,675 security incidents between 15 February and 15 May. The use of improvised explosive devices caused 1,018 civilian casualties — 311 people were killed and 707 injured. Two heinous and cowardly terrorist attacks took place in Nangarhar on 16 and 17 June, which left at least 43 people dead and 45 injured, and there was a suicide bombing in Kabul on 11 June, which claimed lives of 17 people and injured at least 40. I would like to express my sincere condolences to the Government of Afghanistan. Such attacks target not only Government officials, Afghan police and security forces, but also civilians, causing the deaths of innocent people and instilling fear throughout the country.

Secretary-General António Guterres has made countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism the highest priorities on his agenda. In just two days, we will host in New York the first ever High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of

Member States. We hope the Conference will provide an opportunity for frank and candid discussions among counter-terrorism practitioners and boost international counter-terrorism cooperation. It is very important that civil society take part in the meeting. The international community has a solid foundation on which to build. The international legal framework, including counter-terrorism conventions and protocols, relevant Security Council resolutions and the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism strategy, which Member States are currently reviewing for the sixth time, all provide that foundation. I hope that final discussions on the review process will be successful and that we can approve the outcome document.

Nonetheless, having the framework is not enough. A stronger focus on implementation is needed. Afghanistan genuinely needs and continues to request legal technical assistance and capacity-building projects to strengthen its national criminal justice framework to combat terrorism. I am grateful for the information provided in that regard by the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED). Acting on behalf of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, the Executive Directorate visited Afghanistan in early 2017 to monitor its implementation of resolutions 1373 (2001), 1624 (2005) and 2178 (2014) and identify its related technical assistance needs.

In October 2017, the Counter-Terrorism Committee approved the mission report, which identifies 24 priority areas where Afghanistan would benefit from receiving technical assistance, including with regard to legal matters, international cooperation, countering the financing of terrorism, law enforcement and border security and countering radicalization and incitement to commit terrorist acts. To support Afghanistan's implementation efforts, the Counter-Terrorism Committee held an informal meeting on 28 November 2017 to discuss the challenges, focusing in particular on the 24 priority needs. On behalf of the Office of Counter-Terrorism, I participated in the meeting, together with the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan, a representative of Afghanistan's National Security Council, UNAMA, other relevant entities and INTERPOL.

The Office of Counter-Terrorism has been working in collaboration with the Government of Afghanistan on how it can best support Afghanistan's needs in the areas of countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism, both at national and regional levels, based on the CTED's priority recommendations. In May, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, located in Ashgabat, launched the third phase of the Joint Plan of Action for the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, entitled "Towards a Comprehensive Implementation of United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia". The new initiative sheds light on the emerging challenges faced by the region, including the spillover of the conflict from Afghanistan. I am delighted that Afghanistan has actively collaborated with the United Nations both on the development and the implementation of the Plan.

I hope that Afghan counterparts will participate in the upcoming United Nations training sessions on border security, countering the use of the Internet for propaganda and recruitment purposes by terrorists and tackling drug trafficking as a means to finance terrorism, organized under the umbrella of the Joint Plan of Action. It is clear that terrorism has a very real and direct impact on the enjoyment of human rights. Counter-terrorism efforts should be based on respect for human rights and the rule of law. The Office of Counter-Terrorism stands ready to provide capacity-building in that regard.

Allow me to express my strong support for all Afghan victims and survivors of terrorism and praise the resilience of the Afghan people. The leadership of Afghanistan helped to establish the International Day of Remembrance and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism on 21 August through General Assembly resolution 72/165. The Office of Counter-Terrorism has recently launched a Victims of Terrorism programme that will demonstrate solidarity with victims, raise awareness on their needs and work towards the fulfilment of their rights through practical activities, such as building the capacity of victims to put forward counter-narratives to those of violent extremists; strengthening mechanisms to provide practical resources to victims, through the United Nations Victims of Terrorism Support Portal; and building the capacity of victims associations and Member States to better support and assist the victims of terrorism.

The Office of Counter-Terrorism will continue working closely with Afghanistan and other Member States to support the victims of terrorism, including by producing a documentary on Afghanistan in our Victims of Terrorism documentary series project, implemented by the Office, in collaboration with the Department

of Public Information. To further raise awareness on the issue of victims of terrorism, I would like to invite representatives to an event on the sidelines of the High-Level Conference, entitled "Standing in Solidarity for the Rights of Victims of Terrorism", and organized by the Office of Counter-Terrorism, which will be held today in conference room 1 at 6:15 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Voronkov for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr.Saikal (Afghanistan): I would like to begin by congratulating the Russian Federation on its presidency of the Security Council for the month of June and for organizing today's debate. I would like to express our appreciation for the delegation's flexibility in adjusting the date of the debate at our request. Also, we wish the Russian Federation all the best for the World Cup.

I welcome the presence of my good friends, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tadamichi Yamamoto, Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Voronkov and Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Yury Fedotov. We thank them for their briefings.

Since the last meeting of the Council on Afghanistan (S/PV.8199), we experienced a mix of apprehension and hope. The Taliban's so-called spring offensive caused still more deaths and injuries throughout the country, but their attacks faced prompt and at times pre-emptive action from our national security forces and hence were futile in achieving their objectives. In contrast, we reiterated our commitment to peace and to ending violence, offering the Taliban a historic chance to prove their willingness to choose a path away from conflict and destruction, with a key role being played by our Islamic clerics, peace marchers and international partners. We also witnessed notable developments in the regional context, particularly with respect to Afghanistan-Pakistan cooperation.

Further, international support for securing and safeguarding our country against violent attacks remains high. We completed the fourth-year review of our national security strategy at the NATO Ministerial Visit, where the security situation in Afghanistan and our reform measures were discussed. As a key outcome of the gathering, NATO partners renewed commitments to helping fund our security forces for the coming years with annual financial support. In this regard, we look forward to new pledges of support at the July NATO summit in Brussels and the potential contribution of other international partners.

In line with our unremitting commitment to the security of Afghanistan and the wider region, we have moved to double the size of our commando forces and strengthen our air force, which will enhance the overall capability of our national defence and security forces. Reforming our Defence and Interior Ministries also remains a priority; measures are already under way to bring a new generation of highly educated and capable officer corps in our defence and security institutions to leadership positions.

The Security Council is well aware of our firm desire for an end to the senseless violence that has been taking scores of innocent lives each and every day in our country. Earlier this month, the leadership of the National Unity Government took another bold and historic step to achieve lasting peace by announcing a unilateral ceasefire with the Taliban for the end of Ramadan and the Eid al-Fitr holiday. Our announcement responded to a call by a grand gathering of around 2,500 Islamic clerics from 34 provinces who met in Kabul and condemned acts of terror and violent extremism as contrary to Islamic tenets and principles. These developments complement our revitalized peace strategy, which was unveiled at the second Kabul Process Conference and reaffirmed in Tashkent later on.

The initiative once again demonstrated our willingness to make a difficult and selfless decision in favour of peace for our people. The ceasefire was mutually observed during the three days of Eid. At the expiration of this period, we extended it for an additional 10 days. Regrettably, the Taliban failed to reciprocate, and carried out terrorist attacks on a number of occasions. We thank the Council and all its members for joining our call to the Taliban to re-engage in the ceasefire and take part in peace talks without preconditions. We appreciate efforts from within our region and beyond in helping to create an environment conducive to a ceasefire during the religious holiday.

During the ceasefire, our security forces acted to defend our territorial integrity and continued operations against elements of foreign terrorist groups, including Da'esh and Al-Qaida, inter alia. They played a major role in the elimination of Mullah Fazlullah, head of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan terrorist group, which was

an important development that reaffirmed our long-standing policy of combating terrorist groups with equal measure and focus and without any distinction.

The success of the peace process will depend on a number of factors. We need to further strengthen our unity, continue to keep our people informed and involved at all stages of the process, ensure effective management of future ceasefires and potential negotiations, guarantee genuine implementation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, and work to further improve regional and global consensus on the international effort in Afghanistan. It is imperative that our zeal for peace be based on political, social and diplomatic efforts, coupled with security considerations whose only aim should be to strengthen our unity and stability. We must make sure that opportunities for peace are seized, not lost or turned into new challenges. That will only be possible by ensuring that the overall outcome conforms to the wishes and expectations of all Afghans, across the full spectrum of society.

To that end, ensuring transparency in all stages of the peace process and preventing any degree of misuse will remain important. It is also essential that peace efforts serve to complement and reinforce social cohesion and consensus on other national issues, including the consolidation of democracy, in particular through the forthcoming elections. Furthermore, preserving fundamental human rights, particularly of women, and ensuring justice for victims remain of paramount importance.

With regard to regional cooperation, a number of high-level reciprocal visits between Kabul and Islamabad have led to a new framework in the form of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity. The seven agreed principles cover a number of important areas, including counter-terrorism cooperation and Pakistan's support for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, visited Kabul on 12 June, and important discussions were held with Afghan leadership, focusing on the sincere, effective and timely implementation of the Action Plan through concrete measures. Last week, a senior Afghan delegation visited Islamabad again in order to generate positive momentum on the Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity. The framework has the conceptual ingredients to shift dynamics towards greater trust, confidence and mutual cooperation, but an agreement is only as good as the will there is to implement it. And we, for our part, cannot overstate our commitment to its terms in letter and spirit and expect Pakistan to do the same.

In the broader context, we have expanded dialogue for greater cooperation with a number of countries, including those in our immediate region, as well as our Central Asian partners. The past three months have also witnessed developments that we hope will strengthen regional consensus in support of the joint strategy of Afghanistan and its international partners. To that end, we wish to reaffirm our overriding commitment to ensuring Afghanistan's centrality as a platform for cordiality and win-win cooperation for all. I repeat: to that end, we wish to reaffirm our overriding commitment to ensuring Afghanistan's centrality as a platform for cordiality and win-win cooperation for all.

Earlier this month, President Ghani attended the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Qingdao, China. Together with SCO member and observer States, we reiterated our position that expanding regional connectivity and overcoming the nexus of transnational crime and terrorism are fundamental for stability and prosperity in the wider region. With the revitalized SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group, we look forward to increased cooperation with that important forum.

Four months from now, we are scheduled to hold our parliamentary and district council elections. Preparations are under way for these, along with presidential elections next year. So far more than 7.3 million citizens have registered to vote, demonstrating their firm conviction that democracy, pluralism, and the rule of law are the bedrock of our stable future. Our hope and expectation is to ensure that these elections are transparent, credible and inclusive, in accordance with our people's demands. We are pleased that a number of young talented figures have stepped up as candidates. To that end, reform measures are under way in the Independent Election Commission and the commission on electoral complaints. Moreover, a list of new nominees for the position of Chief of the secretariat of the Independent Election Commission was presented to the leadership for consideration and approval.

Ensuring security for the elections is another important priority, and I am pleased to inform the Council that comprehensive security arrangements

have been put in place for that purpose. As a final note on this issue, we reiterate that the successful completion of the electoral processes is of vital importance for our unity and political stability.

The next main international event on the political calendar concerns the Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, which will be co-chaired by Afghanistan and the United Nations in Geneva in November. We look forward to presenting the highlights of the progress made against key benchmarks from the Brussels Conference, based on our national peace and development framework. These include progress in the areas of governance, public-sector reform, local governance, economic growth, and promoting and protecting human rights. We look to international partners to recommit new support over the coming years for our stability and prosperity. We look forward to high-level participation from our regional and international partners. The Conference comes at an important time, when the level of regional and international consensus on Afghanistan, particularly on the imperative of peace, is at its highest point since 2001.

Looking ahead, we will remain focused on other pressing priorities, such as the looming effects of the drought, with the prospect of displacing half a million people. The situation warrants immediate international attention. I strongly call upon the international community to fully fund Afghanistan's Humanitarian Response Plan covering 2018-2021. We thank the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other United Nations agencies for their tireless efforts on the ground and call on the broader donor community to join the relief efforts.

By the same token, we will remain engaged in implementing our national strategy to address the lingering problem of narcotics in all its aspects. We hope to do so with a greater degree of collaboration with regional and international partners. This year, we continued to work on multiple fronts to combat this threat as a key priority in the work of the National Unity Government. This included eradication, law enforcement and alternative livelihood measures. In the first six months alone, our counter-narcotics police force carried out 1,688 operations nationwide, seizing more than 112,500 tons of illicit drugs and destroying a significant number of drug-processing laboratories.

We hope to witness more tangible progress in this effort, which will be possible only with greater cooperation among regional and international actors, including in curtailing driving factors such as the trafficking of precursors and reducing demand. We appreciate the support role of UNODC in this effort and thank the Executive Director for leading the agencies' work in Afghanistan.

We are looking to the future with a degree of optimism in the light of recent developments concerning our peace efforts, including the announcement of the ceasefire and a possible shift in regional dynamics in support of peace. Moreover, our progress towards economic integration in the wider region, through various mega economic and infrastructure projects, continues unabated on a positive trajectory. Institutional reforms will remain a key component of our strategy for the promotion of the rule of law and our stability. In the broader perspective, we believe that these gains can best be solidified in an atmosphere in which all partners work together, in unison and cooperation, for a strategic objective that is vital to us all.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I thank the three briefers for having shared their insightful analysis on the latest developments in Afghanistan. We were touched by the impressive pictures of the peace march that Special Representative Yamamoto just showed us.

We align ourselves with the European Union statement to be delivered later in the debate.

Last week my Minister for Foreign Affairs, Steph Blok, visited Afghanistan. The message he consistently heard from many Afghans was one of peace and reconciliation. One Afghan youth wisely told him:

"Blood cannot be washed away with blood".

These words coincided with powerful images of hope at the end of Ramadan, showing Afghans uniting for peace. I thank Mr. Yamamoto for sharing these pictures as well. Afghans celebrated the first peaceful Eid al-Fitr since 2001, and there were marches for peace throughout the country.

The Afghan people clearly want peace, not tomorrow but today. But their call for peace is still not heeded by all. Brutal and heinous attacks continue. The Taliban has not reciprocated the extension of the ceasefire by

the Government of Afghanistan. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province is still carrying out deplorable acts of terror. Yet there remains space for accelerated momentum and hope. That is what we as a Council need to rally behind, using all of our leverage, bilaterally and collectively.

In this context, I will touch on three points: first, the peace process; secondly, the elections; and, thirdly, the nexus between crime and terrorism.

My first point concerns our collective responsibility for an inclusive and Afghan-owned peace process, which is the only way in which true stability in Afghanistan can be realized. Our Minister for Foreign Affairs reassured President Ghani last week of our strong support for his courageous efforts in pushing the peace process forward.

Neighbouring countries should also shoulder their responsibility by actively contributing to the momentum, and we very much welcome the progress reported in this regard.

As the Council we continue to be united in our messaging, as we were in our statement to the press issued last week. Our unity is crucial.

The Taliban should accept the offer by the Afghan Government to engage in direct peace talks without any preconditions. All parties should respect international humanitarian law and put the protection of civilians first.

We commend the comprehensive, integrated approach just described by Mr. Yamamoto of combining peace, security and development in policies. Nationally the Kingdom of the Netherlands is ready to do its part as well in an integrated manner. Our bilateral development cooperation with Afghanistan continues, and our Government decided last week to substantially increase its support for Afghanistan with additional military and police advisers in the Resolute Support Mission. We will also extend the mandate of the whole contingent until the end of 2021. And, of course, we support the election process.

That brings me to my second point: progress in preparing the elections. It is important that the Council pronounce itself on this. The first phase of registration has been concluded successfully, which is very encouraging. At the same time, the Afghan Government and the Independent Election Commission will need to step up their efforts. Reforms and preparations need to stay on track. The credibility of the Independent Election Commission in this is key. Trust in the Commission in large part will determine the trust of the Afghan people in the results of the election, and any issues arising in that regard need to be dealt with transparently, swiftly and effectively.

Furthermore, women's participation in the elections, as voters and as candidates, is crucial. Political and decision-making processes are incomplete without the involvement of women. That was the message we heard from the civil society briefers during the previous debate on Afghanistan in March (see S/PV.8199). We also heard it during the Council's visit to Afghanistan in January.

Young people have a crucial role in building a culture of peace. That was reaffirmed by resolution 2419 (2018), adopted this month, on youth, peace and security. Investing in Afghan youth will bring stability to the country. We are pleased with the election in Afghanistan last week of the first ever Afghan Youth Representative to the United Nations. My Minister was a proud member of the jury, together with Mr. Yamamoto.

My third point concerns the nexus between organized crime and terrorism. Terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province and Al-Qaida remain active. They undermine State security, stability and development, and often conditions for organized crime and violent extremism converge. The Government of Afghanistan, in our view, should continue to address the nexus between these two phenomena, for example by strengthening capacities, including border control. In general, we believe that the nexus between organized crime and terrorism is an important topic for the Council.

In conclusion, the Afghan people need a workable peace deal. That will require political courage, perseverance and the continued unity of the Council. Galvanizing the momentum of the Afghan-owned peace process is our collective responsibility. We should remain clear in our joint message on the importance of credible elections with strong participation of women.

Finally, I want to thank the Special Representative and his team for their tremendous efforts in assisting Afghanistan in often difficult circumstances. They deserve our full support. The Afghan people should be able to count on the Council. Let the Council answer the call for peace, as expressed in the impressive Afghan

peace march, and let the Council be a beacon of hope for the people of Afghanistan.

Mr. Duclos (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the convening of this morning's meeting and the briefings of Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Mr. Vladimir Voronkov and Mr. Yury Fedotov, as well as the statement of the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Mr. Mahmoud Saikal.

Peru notes with concern the security situation that Afghanistan continues to face. We strongly condemn the suicide attacks perpetrated by Da'esh and Taliban groups, which have serious consequences for civilians and the stability of the country even as preparations for a major electoral process are under way. Faced with those repugnant attempts to undermine democracy, we want to pay tribute to the courage of the Afghan people and the endeavours of their authorities, who are pursuing the voter registration process and other work in preparation for the parliamentary elections and district elections scheduled for 20 October.

We also want to associate ourselves with the call of Secretary-General António Guterres on the various political groups to speak and act as one on the need to tackle those threats and, on that basis, on the governance and reconciliation of the country. The objective of sustainable peace ought to spur all actors to pursue that course of action. We must deplore the refusal of the Taliban to extend the ceasefire as proposed by the Afghan Government at the end of the Eid al-Fitr holiday. That refusal stands in contrast to the mass mobilization of the Afghan people in the so-called march for peace, held during Ramadan, to express their support for a lasting ceasefire.

Peru reiterates its support for the Kabul process, designed and led by the Afghans themselves. We are convinced that intra-Afghan dialogue, supported by the countries of the region, is the only viable path to sustainable peace.

We would like to underscore the Afghan Government's commitment to increasing the number of women in the public sector, as well as the importance of compliance with the national strategy and action plan for the elimination of violence against women, and the concurrent efforts of the Independent Human Rights Commission.

However, we must express our concern about the situation described by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights after his visit in May. In particular, we are concerned about the increase in the number of children recruited by the different factions of the conflict, who often fall victim to sexual violence. There is a need for immediate action by the Government to counter that practice, as well as to provide for the rehabilitation of victims.

We also consider the fight against corruption and illicit drug trafficking to be a priority. Mr. Fedotov reported record figures for the opium harvest in 2018. That is a business that undermines the framework of institutions and encourages terrorism. We welcome the efforts that are being developed on a joint basis to reverse this situation. Allow me to recall that the Council is committed to supporting the efforts of the Afghan Government in its fight against those scourges. We would like to express our regret to and solidarity with the relatives of the recently assassinated counter-narcotics police officer who was recently murdered for courageously confronting that type of organized crime, as well as those of other officials.

In conclusion, we associate ourselves with the Secretary-General's call for humanitarian assistance to be provided, through the donation of the necessary funds, to the more than 2 million people whose situation has been aggravated by the drought affecting that country.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto, Executive Director Fedotov; and Under-Secretary-General Voronkov for their briefings. China listened attentively to the statement by the representative of Afghanistan.

Peace and stability in Afghanistan have a direct bearing on the well-being of the Afghan people, as well as on security, stability, development and prosperity in the region. The Afghan parliamentary and district council elections will be held during the year and preparations are under way. The recent terrorist attacks caused a large number of civilian casualties and the political and security situation in Afghanistan remains severe.

China welcomes President Ghani's recent unilateral declaration of a temporary ceasefire with the Taliban and appreciates the Afghan Government's efforts to maintain national stability and promote national reconciliation and economic development. The

international community should continue to provide strong support for Afghanistan.

Peace and stability are the foundation for Afghanistan's national reconstruction and economic development. The international community should continue to support the capacity-building efforts of the Afghan National Security Forces, strengthen Afghanistan's self-defence capacities and work together to effectively address such threats as terrorism, transnational crime and drug trafficking. At the same time, regional efforts should be made to help Afghanistan meet those challenges. The international community should strengthen coordination and cooperation in combating regional forces of terrorism. Strengthening governance is an important guarantee for promoting peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan.

Afghan affairs should ultimately be determined by the Afghan people. All political parties in the country should strengthen unity and resolve differences through dialogue and consultation. The international community must earnestly respect the Afghan people's right to independently choose their political system and path to development. In accordance with Afghanistan's national development strategy and specific needs, it should help the Afghan Government improve its governance capacity in a targeted manner. Advancing national reconciliation is essential to resolving the question of Afghanistan. We should firmly support an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process, including supporting the role that the Kabul process continues to play. We support the Afghan Government in reaching an agreement on national reconciliation with armed opposition groups, including the Taliban, and launching the peace process. The Taliban should actively respond to the peace initiative of the Afghan Government and commit to lasting peace and stability in the country.

As a historically friendly neighbour of Afghanistan, China has always supported the country in achieving peace, security, stability and development as soon as possible. Subsequent to the first Foreign Ministers' dialogue with Afghanistan and Pakistan hosted by China last December, China hosted in Beijing in May a Deputy Foreign Minister-level strategic dialogue among China, Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as a Deputy Foreign Minister-level counter-terrorism security consultation among those three countries and a Deputy Foreign Minister-level meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)-Afghanistan Contact Group. President Ghani, as Head of an observer nation, attended the eighteenth meeting of the Council of Heads of SCO member States in Qingdao, China, in early June. All of the activities I just mentioned achieved positive results in promoting a political settlement of the Afghanistan issue, while strengthening regional cooperation and advancing counter-terrorism efforts. China is ready to continue to use the mechanisms I just referred to in order to strengthen cooperation with Afghanistan and other countries in the region to jointly address the threat of terrorism and promote regional peace, stability and development.

Afghanistan is an important country within the Belt and Road Initiative. Security Council resolutions have pointed out time and again that all parties should take advantage of the Initiative to promote economic development in Afghanistan and regional cooperation, in that regard, so as to help Afghanistan achieve stability and prosperity and, through dialogue and cooperation, make concerted efforts to create a community with a shared future for humankind. In accordance with the provisions set out in the relevant Security Council resolutions, China will continue to work with all other parties to help the country leverage its comprehensive and comparative advantages, participate in regional economic cooperation and connectivity and achieve economic and social development.

In conclusion, I would like to commend the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and voice support for the positive role that UNAMA has played in helping Afghanistan promote the political process, safeguard national security, foster economic development and enhance its governance capacity. China will continue to support UNAMA and Special Representative Yamamoto in their work.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, let me thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his very enlightening briefing, especially on peace efforts and the electoral process. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Voronkov and Executive Director Fedotov for their briefings on combating terrorism and drug trafficking in Afghanistan, where the conflict is tragically illustrative of the persistent combination of local and global factors, whether relating to terrorism, drug trafficking, negative climactic developments or non-respect for basic rights, in particular those of children and women.

France associates itself with the statement to be delivered shortly by the observer of the European Union.

I will comment on four areas today.

My first observation concerns the security situation in Afghanistan, which continues to be extremely unstable and calls for pursuing efforts to protect civilians. France condemns in the strongest terms the two suicide bombings perpetrated on 16 and 17 June by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province in the province of Nangarhar. That type of asymmetrical attack — whether carried out by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province or the Taliban — has become the leading cause of civilian deaths, as the Secretary-General pointed out in his quarterly report (S/2018/539). In that regard, more must be done to protect women and children, who are especially vulnerable should there be a resurgence of violence. Almost one in three victims in Afghanistan last year was a child. The implementation of the national action plan deserves praise, but much remains to be done — for example, concerning the detention of children, their recruitment by parties to the conflict and the police force, and early or forced marriages. France reiterates its full support for the Afghan Government in its struggle against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province and the Taliban insurgency. In particular, we must see to it that foreign terrorist fighters fleeing Iraq and the Syria are prevented from finding refuge in Afghanistan.

France remains very concerned about drug trafficking, which continues to fuel the illicit economy, finance the Taliban insurgency and terrorist groups, and threaten the health of many Afghans. As Mr. Fedotov just underscored, recent developments give cause for concern, with an unprecedented level of opium production since last year. France calls on the Afghan authorities to redouble their efforts in that area, with the support of the international community and the United Nations. We hope that this subject, which is crucial to the future of the country, will be brought up at the ministerial conference on Afghanistan to be held in Geneva in November. In that regard, the Paris Pact Initiative remains an optimal framework for sharing ideas among all countries affected by drug trafficking in Afghanistan.

My second point concerns the fact that the dire security situation and the human cost of the conflict must motivate us to redouble efforts to achieve lasting peace in Afghanistan. We have seen encouraging signs over recent weeks. The ceasefires, which were honoured during Eid Al-Fitr, at the Afghan Government's initiative, have given hope to the Afghan people, who have begun their march towards peace. France welcomes the unilateral extension of the ceasefire by Afghan forces but regrets that the Taliban did not respond positively to President Ghani's offer to extend the ceasefire beyond Eid Al-Fitr. In that regard France highlights the importance of the Kabul process for peace and security and calls on the Taliban to engage in direct negotiations as President Ghani has proposed. At the same time, we recall the demand of the international community that the Taliban renounce all forms of violence. Lastly, the improvement in the regional dynamic must be commended and encouraged.

With regard to the electoral process — this being my third point — France welcomes the preparatory efforts of the Afghan Independent Election Commission. As of today, nearly 7 million registrations have been recorded on the electoral lists — an encouraging, albeit inadequate, number. We call on the Afghan Government to pursue those efforts, with the support of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and its international partners, to conduct free, credible and transparent elections according to the agreed timeline. The Independent Election Commission must continue to work towards ensuring the largest voter turn-out among the population. In that regard, we are concerned about the dearth of candidates in some provinces. It is also important to recall that women can fully participate in the electoral process both as voters and as candidates. In order to sustainably improve women's political participation, support — including financial support — for the national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, is needed today.

Lastly, my fourth remark concerns indispensable international support for Afghanistan. By renewing UNAMA's mandate in March, the Council reiterated its unwavering commitment to restoring peace in Afghanistan.

In conclusion, I welcome the exceptional dedication of UNAMA's personnel, who work with courage and perseverance in particularly difficult conditions.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): At the outset, I would like to thank the Russian presidency for convening this important debate on the situation in Afghanistan

and express my gratitude to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto, Under-Secretary-General Voronkov and Under-Secretary-General Fedotov for their comprehensive updates. We also appreciate the statement of our good friend Ambassador Saikal.

We would like to express our appreciation for the dedicated work of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto and the team of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, as well as that of other United Nations agencies, to bring peace and security to Afghanistan. The delegation of Kazakhstan, being committed to the stable development of Afghanistan as our neighbour, friend and partner, would like to highlight five key points today.

First, on the political-military dimension, we commend the Afghan Government's efforts on the political track to launch an intra-Afghan political dialogue to stabilize the situation, improve public administration, reform the legal sphere and prepare for the upcoming parliamentary elections in October. The elections should be fair, free, transparent, trustworthy and inclusive if they are to succeed, as preliminarily discussed this January during the Security Council mission to Kabul. To demonstrate our continued support for the Afghan Government in that regard, we believe that a Security Council press statement would be quite timely. We also welcome the second meeting of the Kabul process for peace and security cooperation as an Afghan-led and -owned peace effort, as well as the adoption of the Kabul declaration. We also welcome the intensified Afghan-Pakistani talks on building peace, security and confidence between the two neighbours. We stress the need to continue providing diversified assistance to Afghanistan during the transformation period. My country has therefore provided $4 million to the Afghan National Army to train Afghan military specialists.

Secondly, on the security track, despite the effective measures taken by the international community and the Government, the security situation remains complicated. We express our hope that the brief ceasefire announced by the Afghan Government and the armed opposition during the holy month of Ramadan and the Eid Al-Fitr holiday, will be the first step towards national reconciliation.

Thirdly, on the counter-terrorism track, we must say that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Da'esh in Afghanistan remains combat-capable and continues to step up its presence in various provinces of the country. Increased terrorist activity in the north of Afghanistan, near its borders with Central Asian States, is of particular concern. In that regard, the effective implementation of the third phase of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia is important. Afghanistan must serve as a platform where the Security Council demonstrates its unity in the fight against this persistent scourge and collectively confronts it. We express our deep concern over the increase of drug production in Afghanistan, which is one of the main sources for terrorist financing. In that connection, we also welcome the outcomes of the high-level international conference on countering terrorism and violent extremism, held on 3 and 4 May in Dushanbe.

Fourthly, we fully support Special Representative Yamamoto's view that peace and security are closely connected with development and that we need to increase regional connectivity and economic cooperation in the wider region in order to achieve stability and prosperity in Afghanistan and its neighbourhood. In that context, we welcome the Tashkent international high-level conference on peace and development in Afghanistan, held in late March. The launch of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline project is also a welcome measure. That, along with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization road map to assist Afghanistan, corresponds to the common position in our part of the world to strengthen ties with Afghanistan as a potentially profitable economic partner.

In that connection, we see it as critically important to implement the three-pronged strategy for conflict prevention, which includes strengthening the security and development nexus and utilizing a regional whole-of-system approach based on the development strategy for the wider region. In that regard, we note the importance of regional cooperation as a means of ensuring the economic prosperity of Afghanistan and strengthening its security. We must involve regional countries in the development of trade, economic, transit/transport and humanitarian ties with Afghanistan by providing them with related grants for such purposes.

In addition, we believe that it is necessary to involve the United Nations in the development of a regional development strategy, including engaging all country offices of the Organization, in accordance with the priorities of the Governments of the region and

Afghanistan, while uniting and coordinating the efforts of all funds and programmes based on the Delivering as One principle. The main task is to integrate the region on development programmes for the Sustainable Development Goals through trade and economic integration and connectivity.

Fifthly, Kazakhstan attaches great importance to the empowerment of women and the development of education, as it does to strengthening the role of women and easing the plight of children in Afghanistan in order to ensure the country's stable and progressive development. In that regard, an official ceremony dedicated to the completion of Kazakhstan's assistance project in Afghanistan, through the mediation of the United Nations Development Programme, was held in April in Astana. The project was aimed at strengthening the economic independence of Afghan women and training Afghan citizens in Kazakhstan. Training was provided in needed fields for Afghanistan, such as public administration and health, with a special focus on maternal and child health.

In the light of the successful completion of Kazakhstan's public educational programme for Afghanistan, we proposed to prolong it with the help of other stakeholders. We suggested to our partners to consider continuing the programme in a trilateral format — to be comprised of Kazakhstan, Afghanistan and the corresponding sponsor.

In addition, next September in Astana, we are planning to organize an international conference entitled "Expanding Opportunities for Women in Afghanistan". The main goals of the conference are to assess the role and contribution of women to the peaceful development of Afghanistan and the issues related to empowering Afghan women in the socioeconomic and political spheres by increasing their participation in the public and private sectors. The conference will also provide an opportunity to share international experiences in the promotion of gender equality and to develop specific recommendations for empowering women in Afghanistan.

The Government of Kazakhstan made a contribution to UNICEF in 2018 for projects on reintegration, rehabilitation and providing access to education for children in Afghanistan.

In general, Kazakhstan will continue to assist Afghanistan in all areas in order to achieve peace and stability in that brother country. Cooperation between Afghanistan and Central Asian States could become a model of partnership for peace and development for other regions. We have great hope for the forthcoming ministerial conference on Afghanistan in Geneva, to be held on 25 November, and we look forward to a productive discussion on ensuring security and development in Afghanistan and the wider region.

Mrs. Mele Colifa (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to thank Mr. Yamamoto for his comprehensive and informative briefing on the situation in Afghanistan and the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I also thank Mr. Yury Fedotov, Mr. Vladimir Voronkov and the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Mr. Mahmoud Saikal, for their excellent statements.

Despite the ongoing efforts of the Afghan Government, which the Republic of Equatorial Guinea commends and supports, it is evident that the peace, security and, consequently, stability and prosperity for the people of Afghanistan seems like a pipe dream for those who, on a daily basis, suffer the catastrophic consequences of lethal attacks. The incessant attacks in public places and the indiscriminate use of improvised explosive devices by anti-Government elements and suicide bombers are nothing more than cowardly attacks on the vulnerable in society. Such attacks are highly disturbing. We therefore urge all parties to the conflict to take all possible measures to protect the civilian population, in particular women and children, in accordance with the provisions of international humanitarian law and the basic norms of human rights.

Likewise, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea is concerned about the ongoing increase in the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. In that regard, we welcome Mr. Yamamoto's remarks with regard to urging the Government to adopt the necessary measures to ensure referral and rehabilitation mechanisms for the victims.

The threat of terrorism and the drug problem are closely linked. Drugs continue to be an significant source of funding for terrorists in Afghanistan. Close cooperation between the Government and the relevant regional organizations is therefore necessary to combat the trafficking in such drugs, especially opium.

Bearing in mind that the elections constitute a crucial moment for the renewal of political trust and the forging of the desired stability in Afghanistan, the Government of Equatorial Guinea welcomes the

decision of the Independent Election Commission to set a date for the parliamentary and district council elections. It is vital that the Independent Election Commission and all the political parties concerned join forces so that transparent, inclusive and credible elections can be held on the scheduled date in the manner lawfully established by the country's national legislation. To that end, the United Nations must play an significant role in supporting the holding of free and fair elections. We commend UNAMA in particular for supporting the Afghan Government in ensuring that voter registration is completed in accordance with the agreed deadlines.

Like all the representatives who have spoken here today, we believe that the only effective way to ensure the long-term security and stability of Afghanistan is by means of a political process and broad and inclusive reconciliation that are Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. The international community must therefore continue to provide robust support to Afghanistan so that it can respond to the many political, economic and security challenges.

To conclude, we would once again like to reiterate our praise for all the efforts made by the Government of Afghanistan that are reflected in the report presented today (S/2018/539). We encourage it not to give up on developing a strategy based on open and inclusive negotiations so as to achieve stability for the Afghan people. Clearly, we once again underscore the commendable work of Mr. Yamamoto and of his entire team in supporting Afghan society, in promoting and monitoring the human rights situation, in furthering peace and reconciliation and in providing valuable assistance to the Government of Afghanistan.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): On 12 May, a small group of ordinary Afghan citizens began an extraordinary journey. They left their homes in Helmand province to begin a 600-kilometre march to Afghanistan's capital, Kabul. As they marched, their numbers increased and they were greeted by large crowds when they arrived in Kabul on 18 June. They brought with them a simple message. After 40 years of violence and conflict, the time for peace in Afghanistan has come. In the presence of Ambassador Saikal, I want to pay tribute to the incredible resolve and resilience of the Afghan people. The widespread support for the march was a demonstration of the strong desire for peace in Afghan, all the more after the brief but historic ceasefires that inspired it. However, while the past weeks have offered a much-needed glimpse of hope, we remain concerned about the security situation in Afghanistan.

The continued high number of civilian casualties, not least among children, and the attacks against humanitarian and development workers are unacceptable. International humanitarian law applies to all parties. There is no military solution to the conflict. The only viable option is an inclusive and Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process, leading to a politically negotiated settlement. We strongly welcome the unprecedented steps taken by the Afghan Government in the pursuit of peace. The Government's peace offer at the second Kabul process conference and its temporary unilateral ceasefire are commendable. We deeply regret that the Taliban has not extended its partial ceasefire. We call on the Taliban to respond to the plea for peace from the Afghan people and to engage in a dialogue with the Government to achieve that end.

A peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan is key to achieving development and prosperity in the broader region. That should be in everyone's interest. We urge all those with stakes and influence, especially the countries of the region, to act with full and unreserved commitment to engaging constructively in support of a political solution. Indeed, many challenges faced by Afghanistan are common to the countries of the region: security threats, radicalization, the production of, and trade in, narcotics — with all its negative effects, as highlighted by Executive Director Fedotov earlier this morning — climate change and conflicts over water and energy resources. Through regional cooperation, such challenges can be addressed and transformed into mutually beneficial opportunities.

Women's full and effective participation in peace processes and political, social and economic life is essential to creating legitimate systems that cater to the needs of the whole population. In addition, it is difficult to think of any other structural change that would more effectively reject what the Taliban stands for. I want to welcome the efforts that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan has made to that end, which we support. We encourage efforts to ensure women's full participation in the preparations and in the ministerial meeting in Geneva in November.

For our part, to that end and through our most recent contribution to the Afghan National Army trust fund, we support the establishment of the first Women's Police Town, which is aimed at enabling and furthering

women's participation in the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces.

It is imperative for Afghanistan's future and stability that the planned elections take place in 2018 and 2019 according to schedule and that they be conducted in an inclusive, credible and transparent manner. We urge all stakeholders to do their utmost to ensure increased women's participation in the elections. Recent targeted assaults on the electoral preparations are not only horrific attacks on civilians but also direct attacks on the efforts to build democracy. We support the proposal put forward by the representative of the Netherlands this morning that the Security Council stay engaged and make public statements in support of the electoral process moving forward.

At the NATO Summit in Brussels on 11 and 12 July, we will reaffirm our commitment to doing our part to strengthen and to enable a self-sufficient Afghan security sector that is able to provide the conditions necessary to increased security in Afghanistan. Combating terrorism, creating stability and building national capacity and strong institutions will require action to address the political and economic root causes of conflict and instability. Our commitment to Afghanistan remains firm. It includes $1 billion in bilateral development assistance from 2015 to 2024, humanitarian assistance, capacity-building and dialogue and mediation training, including for local female actors, as well as our military contribution to the NATO Resolute Support Mission.

With regard to the effect of the conflict on children, as stated by the representative of France, we welcome the Government's commitment to including concrete actions in the criminal code to protect children and prevent their recruitment, including the establishment of child protection units by the Ministry of the Interior in all provinces. However, because the recruitment and use of children remain prevalent, we strongly emphasize the importance of implementing the penal code, with a focus on accountability, including prosecutions.

Lastly, demonstrators in the march from Helmand to Kabul were between the ages of 17 and 70. Many Afghans' entire lives have been blighted by conflict. All parties must now respond to their call for peace and ensure that future generations of Afghan children can grow up without the shadow of war.

Mr. Djédjé (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Yamamoto, Mr. Fedotov and Mr. Voronkov for their excellent briefings.

My delegation remains concerned about the deteriorating security situation, marked by an increase in the number of indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population, resulting in the death of many people and leaving thousands injured. My country condemns the wave of violence and deadly attacks, which has plunged Afghanistan into mourning, and once again calls on the Security Council to pay greater attention to the security situation in the country. My delegation calls on the Taliban to grant the Afghan President's request to extend the ceasefire and implores it to be firmly committed to direct peace talks without conditions, within the framework of the Kabul process, to achieve a political settlement to the crisis and bring about sustainable peace.

An inclusive political process should lead to credible elections and remains the key to ending the crisis in Afghanistan. In that regard, my delegation welcomes the considerable progress made in the dialogue among Afghan political stakeholders, which helped to peaceably resolve the dispute between President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai and the former governor of Balkh province, Mr. Atta Mohammad Noor. My delegation is also pleased to note President Ghani's implementation of the peace agreement with the leader of Hezb-i-Islami, Mr. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, which has enabled Mr. Hekmatyar to return to Kabul after a 20-year absence, his supporters to be released and members of his movement to assume provincial governorships.

We encourage Afghan stakeholders to continue to engage in dialogue in order to meet their aspirations for peace and take ownership of their country through inclusive and peaceful elections. However, attacks on electoral infrastructure, the abduction of election workers and the intimidation and harassment of registered voters are acts that could disrupt the electoral process and that demand action from the Council. Furthermore, my country commends the Government on its efforts to provide Afghan women with the means to consolidate their place in society and to promote their participation in regional and international initiatives to bring about peace, while protecting their fundamental rights.

The humanitarian situation also remains a source of concern owing to the ongoing drought and low levels of rainfall, which could lead to famine in the country and to the forced displacement of people. According to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/539) of 6 June, more than 2 million people across two thirds of the country will be affected by drought and 1.4 million will be severely affected and require emergency food and water assistance in order to survive. My delegation deplores the very limited access of humanitarian agencies to vulnerable people and the attacks on humanitarian workers, which constitute a breach of international humanitarian law. We therefore call on the international community to respond to the emergency appeal launched by the United Nations aimed at meeting the basic needs of those affected by the drought. My country commends the Afghan Government, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and donor countries on their efforts to organize the ministerial conference on Afghanistan to be held in Geneva on 28 November.

The presence of Islamic State-affiliated terrorist groups in Afghanistan could destabilize the country and the entire region. Côte d'Ivoire reaffirms its support for the efforts of the Afghan authorities to combat terrorism and calls for enhanced regional and international cooperation in that area. My country welcomes the signing of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, which is an innovative partnership for regional cooperation in the areas of counter-terrorism, violence reduction, refugee repatriation and economic development. In addition, the international community should encourage greater coordination between the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Afghan Government in order to cut off the sources of funding for armed groups and terrorists in Afghanistan by providing alternative livelihoods to those living in rural areas who depend on poppy cultivation.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to reiterate its support for the efforts of the Afghan Government to bring about lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan, as well as its gratitude for the work conducted by the Special Representative to the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, through his good offices in the framework of the political dialogue. We encourage him to continue his efforts to restore lasting peace and stability to the country.

Mr. Lewicki (Poland): Let me start by conveying Poland's deepest sympathy following further senseless killing of innocent civilians in the recent attacks. It simply demonstrates the kind of enormous challenges that lie ahead on the path to lasting peace in Afghanistan.

I would like to thank all our briefers — Special Representative Yamamoto, Executive Director Fedotov and Under-Secretary-General Voronkov — for their insightful and thorough briefings. Let me also take this opportunity to pay tribute to the courageous and dedicated team of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for its daily efforts to advance peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Poland aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later today by the observer of the European Union.

Poland reiterates the significance of the peace process, which should be continued through constructive dialogue. In that regard, we recognize President Ghani's comprehensive and unprecedented proposal, which was made during the second Kabul process conference in February, as an important step forward. We hope that that offer will be given a chance and eventually lead to a genuine peace process. We count on the representatives of Taliban groups to respond positively to the offer of peace talks without conditions and to take part in an inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process.

Good governance and successful institution-building require adherence to rules and procedures that enable all citizens to participate in the democratic process. Poland welcomes the announcement of 20 October as the date on which parliamentary elections will be held. We regard as a key political commitment the holding of parliamentary elections in 2018 and presidential elections in 2019 in a transparent, inclusive and credible manner. We note that the process faces challenges at the outset, such as recruiting personnel for electoral bodies and providing security for polling stations. However, such challenges must be overcome by the authorities.

Poland hopes that the new Parliament will create a strong legislative foundation for the sustainable development and protection of human rights in the country. With regard to technical support, we encourage the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan to provide necessary assistance at the request of the Afghan authorities. Broad participation by women, both as candidates and voters, remans a high priority for us.

We see it as an important precondition for enhancing peace and security.

The development of a prosperous and peaceful future must be founded on wide and equal access to education for both boys and girls. Unfortunately, the report published this month by UNICEF, entitled *Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children: Afghanistan Country Study*, indicates that almost half of Afghan children are denied education — a very basic human right — due to a lack of security, poverty and discrimination. We think that the current situation needs to be addressed by the Afghan Government, with strong assistance provided by the international community and civil society organizations.

The security situation in the country continues to negatively impact civilians, particularly those who are most vulnerable, such as women and children. In that respect, I wish to echo the words of the representatives of France and Sweden to the effect that more needs to be done to protect those members of society, particularly children.

The continued violent acts of terrorist groups remind us of the fundamental importance of strengthening Afghanistan's institutions, specifically those tasked with ensuring the security and defence of the country and its people. Poland supports and encourages the Afghan Government to continue its efforts to improve the capability of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. Those undertakings require determination and engagement, which we will continue to support through training and advisory activities, within the framework of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission.

Finally, let me refer to the briefing of Special Representative Yamamoto, who said that there are currently unprecedented opportunities to make progress in seeking peace, and that it is up to the people and Government of Afghanistan to seize those opportunities and strengthen their resolve to achieve lasting peace and development. He also noted that it is up to us, the Security Council, and the international community to provide the Government and the people of Afghanistan with the necessary assistance in that regard.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the briefers: Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Vladimir Voronkov and Mr. Yury Fedotov. We underscore our appreciation for the efforts of UNAMA in supporting the Afghan people in such difficult circumstances.

We have read the Secretary-General's quarterly report (S/2018/539) on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security. We noted the information provided and the realistic assessment of the events in Afghanistan since the last report (S/2018/165). The current report, which covers the events of the last three months, is an amalgamation of positive and negative events. In that regard, I would like to touch upon the following main points.

First, on the political situation, we welcome the announcement by the Independent Election Commission of the upcoming parliamentary elections on 20 October. We commend the progress achieved in the preparations for the parliamentary elections, despite the destabilizing incidents that have occurred in certain provinces in Afghanistan since the announcement. The voter registration process began on 14 April, which is the first time that the country has registered voters since 2003.

My country's delegation noted that the voter-registration process forms part of a national campaign to organize electoral action in the country, which coincides with the distribution of smart identification cards and the naming of polling stations and the cities where voters will be able to vote in the upcoming elections. Moreover, the voter registry has been prepared and linked to polling stations. All such efforts prove that there is a true and genuine desire to achieve tangible progress in Afghanistan. We hope that such preparations will ensure that all Afghan people, men and women alike, are able to participate in the elections.

It is very clear that Afghanistan is going through a transitional critical period, and we would like to commend the people of Afghanistan for their resilience in the face of numerous challenges. We hope that the preparations for the upcoming elections will contribute to further action and consultation among the political parties and leaders of the country with regard to parliamentary coordination and the creation of political coalitions that reduce political tension. Prioritizing national interests over partisan ones is what we called for in the last meeting on this issue (see S/PV.8199). We reiterate that point once again, as national interests must come first.

Secondly, on security, we follow with concern the unstable security situation in Afghanistan, as the Afghan

Government still faces anti-Government forces, such as Taliban and the so called Da'esh and other groups in many parts of the country. Suicidal bombings continue to claim the lives of innocent citizens, and we are also concerned by the breaches of security that occurred in Afghanistan from 15 February to 15 May, amounting to 5,675 incidents. That underscores the staggering task that the Afghan Government and international community are facing, with continuous terrorist attacks perpetrated by Taliban and Da'esh against innocent Afghan citizens and foreigners living in Afghanistan.

We recognize that the increased acts and threats of violence are simply desperate attempts from those who do not believe in democracy or human rights and are adverse to stability and security in the country. With such acts, those groups are trying to delay the upcoming October elections. We hope that the Afghan authorities will continue to thwart such attacks for the remaining period leading up to the elections.

Third, on the humanitarian situation, despite the fact that the number of displaced people has dropped to 65 per cent, we are still concerned about the remaining 75,000 displaced persons, due to armed conflicts this year. The report of the Secretary-General maintains that there are still many internally displaced persons, due to factors such as violence and drought in many provinces, forcing almost 500,000 people to leave their homes and seek other accommodation. My colleague, the representative of Afghanistan, touched upon that matter.

We have repeatedly stressed to the Council the important role of education in building nations. In that regard, Afghanistan can benefit from the education sector. We have followed with concern the findings of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Children and Armed Conflict, which verified 11 incidents of attacks on schools. The unabating Taliban attacks on educational facilities led to the closure of many schools in Kunduz and Logar. Such terrorist threats and acts undermine the future of the country by intimidating children and scaring them away from schools. That is one of the battles that have to be won, as children are the future of Afghanistan and must be protected.

The Government of Afghanistan is making efforts to amend a number of laws on violence against women. We appreciate and commend such efforts. We believe that the Government should continue its efforts in that regard, as it will benefit the Afghan people.

In conclusion, we believe that lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region can be achieved only through an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned negotiated diplomatic settlement. We therefore urge all parties to participate constructively in the efforts to achieve peace through diplomacy in the interests and well-being of the Afghan people. The political, economic and security steps taken by the Government of Afghanistan towards regional connectivity with its neighbouring countries are extremely encouraging, and we urge it to continue on that path. We welcome the signing of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, and we look forward to further interregional cooperation.

Such diplomatic efforts should be accompanied with significant and real investment in the education sector. Investment in the education system, based on gender parity, is the real investment that will help to revive Afghanistan and build a brighter future by the country's educated sons and daughters.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We too would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2018/539) on the situation in Afghanistan and the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We appreciate the briefings of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto, Vladimir Voronkov of the Office of Counter-Terrorism, and Yury Fedotov of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

Afghanistan still faces multiple and complex challenges to its security, stability and development. The people continue to pay a heavy price because of the instability and violence affecting the country, and, as the report of the Secretary-General makes evident, it is civilians, particularly women and children, who are the most vulnerable and face the bulk of the challenges.

According to the Secretary-General's report, the security situation has remained highly unstable in Afghanistan, with several mass-casualty incidents in urban areas. Suicide attacks have become the leading cause of civilian casualties. Once again, we take this opportunity to express our sympathy to and solidarity with the people and Government of Afghanistan for the loss of innocent lives, including those of women and children. We welcome the statement issued by the Security Council (SC/13386) condemning in the strongest terms the two heinous and cowardly terrorist attacks that took place in Nangarhar on 16 and 17 June,

which resulted in at least 43 deaths and 45 injuries. Those acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation.

We appreciate the proposal of President Ghani for direct negotiations with the Taliban, which has received broad and strong support from Afghans and the international community. We also note that the Afghan Government offered another temporary ceasefire during the holiday of Eid al-Fitr and called for an extension to the ceasefire, with no response from the Taliban.

The long-term security and stability of Afghanistan can be ensured only through a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation and political process. In that regard, the renewed call of the Afghan Government for unconditional peace talks with the Taliban and the outlining of a framework for peace that was presented at the Kabul process conference are encouraging and need meaningful support from all stakeholders, including UNAMA. We hope that the Taliban will respond positively to that call and engage in direct talks with the Government with a view to achieving a political settlement and restoring lasting peace and security in Afghanistan.

The support of regional and international stakeholders will be key to the success of the peace process, and we welcome the declaration adopted on 28 February reiterating the support of the international community for the Kabul process for an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process, and reaffirming its commitment to the necessary fight against terrorism in order to bring lasting peace, security, stability and prosperity to Afghanistan.

With regard to the political situation in the country, we take note of the peaceful settlement of the tension between the Presidential Palace and Jam'iyat-i Islami. We hope that the parties will redirect their efforts towards addressing the multiple challenges facing Afghanistan.

The holding of peaceful and democratic parliamentary and district council elections within the set time frame is indeed very important, and we note some of the progress made in preparation for the elections. Accelerating those efforts and building the confidence of the Afghan people in the electoral process through the involvement and participation of all the relevant stakeholders will be key to ensuring the timely and successful holding of the elections. As the Secretary-General's report notes, ensuring an inclusive and credible electoral process while a significant percentage of the population lives in parts of the country that are insecure, with limited State authority, remains a fundamental challenge. The peaceful conduct of elections at all stages is critical to enabling people to exercise their right to vote without fear or threat of insecurity. In that regard, we duly share the Secretary-General's concern about ongoing attempts to disrupt the electoral process through violent means, including tactics such as intimidation and the harassment of registered voters.

Without sustained and inclusive economic growth and development, the peace and security challenges faced by Afghanistan cannot be effectively addressed. That is why the National Unity Government needs the coordinated and comprehensive support of the international community to push forward its political reform and national development priorities, as envisaged in the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework. It is vital that the international community sustain its engagement and deliver on its various commitments in that regard.

Therefore, we further note the steps taken towards closer regional economic cooperation by the Afghanistan Government, including the Afghan segment of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India natural gas pipeline inauguration on 23 February, the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, held in Istanbul on 19 April, and the Afghanistan and Pakistan finalization of an agreement on the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, among others.

In all of those initiatives, the efforts of UNAMA in promoting and supporting peace talk initiatives and reconciliation, dialogue and support for social and economic development, with full respect for the country's sovereignty, as well as its leadership, remains very important. We therefore commend the active engagement of UNAMA with the Government and the people of Afghanistan, in line with its mandate.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation thanks Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General; Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under Secretary-General, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism; and Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

On behalf of my delegation, I wish to express our profound shock at the numerous deaths of civilians that have occurred since the beginning of this year, caused by the conflict in Afghanistan. Moreover, the complex and violent situation that is afflicting the country is occurring within the framework of preparations for inclusive parliamentary and district council elections, scheduled for 20 October. In that regard, Bolivia expresses its concern over the security incidents related to the elections, causing 86 deaths and 185 injuries, the majority women and children. We condemn the fact that around 75 per cent of those violent incidents have taken place in schools or mosques that are being used for electoral purposes.

We also categorically condemn the announcement on 25 April by the Taliban of its annual spring offensive, named the "Al-Khandaq", without having even considered the ceasefire offer made by the Government of Afghanistan within the framework of the second meeting of the Kabul process for peace and security, during which the President presented a proposal for peace talks with the Taliban without preconditions.

It is worth mentioning that, as part of that offer, the President promised that he would consider such issues as political inclusion, a ceasefire, a revision of the Constitution, the release of prisoners, the removal of leaders from sanctions lists and the reintegration of refugees and ex-combatants. However, ignoring the presidential proposal, the Taliban increased its terrorist activities against district administrative centres in April, using improvised explosive devices in attacks of a complex or suicidal nature. To date, such attacks have led to 311 deaths and 707 injuries, the majority civilians.

We also highlight the unilateral ceasefire announced by the Government on 7 June, and we regret that it was not accepted by the Taliban. We firmly condemn all violent actions by anti-Government elements against the Afghan electoral process, such as attacks on electoral facilities, the kidnapping of electoral personnel and the intimidation and harassment of registered voters. We categorically oppose the suicide attacks that were carried out at a national registration centre in Kabul on 22 April and at a voter registration centre in Khost province on 6 May. It is imperative that the Security Council urge all parties to respect the rights of the Afghan people so as to ensure that it is their sovereign decision that reshapes the history of the country.

As on other occasions, my delegation expresses its resounding rejection of the recruitment and use of children by anti-Government elements, as well as any act that endangers the life, integrity and dignity of a child. We are alarmed by the reference in the Secretary-General's report to the fact that the task force verified a case of sexual violence against a child. Such illegal situations and violations of international human rights law must be thoroughly investigated by national jurisdictional bodies to find the perpetrators so that they feel the full force of the law and are held accountable.

Bolivia expresses its support and reaffirms its commitment to the work being carried out by UNAMA in Afghanistan. We are optimistic about the results of the second meeting of the Kabul process on cooperation for peace and security, held on 28 February. The meeting enjoyed the participation of 26 countries, regional organizations and the United Nations, during which they reiterated their full support for the offer of the Government of Afghanistan to engage in direct talks with the Taliban and decided to strengthen regional and international cooperation for peace, reconciliation and the fight against terrorism.

Similarly, with regard to the peace process in Afghanistan, we welcome the fact that the process was reaffirmed at the conference held in Tashkent on 27 March, with the participation of high-level representatives of 23 countries, the European Union and the United Nations. The support of the international community is essential to Afghans finalizing a peace process. On the list of priorities, my delegation wishes to express its full backing for the support provided by UNAMA to the Afghan Government and donors in the preparations for the Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, organized by the United Nations and the Afghan Government, to be held on 28 November in Geneva. We believe that those issues remain key for the conference programme, and the measures that the Government must take in the light of the conference are indispensable to the success of the event.

Furthermore, for my delegation, the fact that in recent months many families have been displaced and forced to move several times, without immediate prospects of a safe and dignified return to their homes, remains an situation that the Security Council must continue to prioritize. In that regard, we call on the countries of the region to reinforce their commitment to the exchange of information and documentation, which, conditions permitting, must guarantee displaced

persons a voluntary, informed, dignified, safe and permanent return to their places of origin and avoid any replication of conditions in which they must return to a situation of insecurity or to areas where they do not come from.

Finally, Bolivia stresses that there is no military solution to the situation in Afghanistan. We endorse any initiative for inclusive dialogue that respects the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan, with the full participation of Afghan women in socioeconomic, political, peace and security processes, with their full protection from any act of violence, in full accordance with the national strategy and action plan on the elimination of violence against women.

Ms. Tachco (United States of America): I want to thank all three briefers for their presentations today. We commend the continued hard work of Special Representative Yamamoto on the ground in Afghanistan.

The United States welcomed President Ghani's announcement of an extension of the temporary ceasefire with the Taliban after the Eid al-Fitr holiday. That was a bold gesture. President Ghani's announcement showed the Government's commitment to peace as both a national and a religious responsibility. Once again, we see that President Ghani is making serious efforts to find a way to end the conflict. Sadly, the Taliban has refused to extend the ceasefire further. We condemn the Taliban's unwillingness to support that offer.

During Eid, we witnessed Afghan soldiers and police sitting with Taliban fighters side by side in prayer. If Afghans can pray together, their leaders can talk together and, ultimately, resolve their differences. The people of Afghanistan deserve a reprieve from the Taliban's campaign of violence — one that lasts longer than a weekend. We urge the Taliban to respond to the call for peace from the Afghan people, reciprocate the Government's ceasefire in full and enter into peace talks without preconditions.

The United States stands ready to work with the Afghan Government, the Taliban and the people of Afghanistan to reach a peace agreement that brings a permanent end to this war. It is also incumbent upon those parties that maintain close ties with the Taliban to use their influence to bring the group to the negotiating table. Those who provide the Taliban and other armed insurgents with weapons, money or political support are fuelling the conflict. That must stop.

As we continue to support the peace process, we have not lost sight of the critical work being done to prepare for Afghanistan's upcoming elections. The United States fully supports timely, credible and transparent parliamentary elections this year, with presidential elections in 2019. Preparations for those elections are at a critical stage, and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan plays an essential role in supporting Afghanistan's electoral commissions. We urge the United Nations to ensure that it remains fully staffed throughout the entire election cycle, in order to continue this vital support. We also appeal to all donors to make a concerted and generous effort in support of those elections, with a view to preventing further political instability that could frustrate efforts to advance the peace process. We have contributed tens of billions of dollars to Afghanistan, including hundreds of millions in support of Afghan elections. We would urge our international partners to do all they can to join us in that effort.

These remain difficult times in Afghanistan. The back-to-back terrorist attacks last week, which killed more than 40 people, show the challenges that the Afghan people continue to face. But despite those obstacles, the ceasefire during Eid gave us a small vision of how life in Afghanistan could change for the better. One Taliban fighter told a reporter that, during the ceasefire, "the people were very happy with the peace. Nothing comes of fighting. It is all loss." A police officer who was able to visit his family in a Taliban-controlled village for the first time in years recalled that "one of my cousins pinched me. He said, 'Is this you, or am I dreaming?'"

Those stories, and many others like them, show what is possible when the Afghan people come together in support of peace. The all-too-brief ceasefire during Eid should encourage all of us to think about what could be within reach. The ceasefire shows that peace is possible. The question is not if we can achieve peace, but how. We must redouble our work to help the Afghan people achieve a peace that can endure.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I thank the briefers, particularly Special Representative Yamamoto, for updating the Council on the latest report (S/2018/539) and for all of the work that he and his team are doing in challenging circumstances.

This feels like a moment of opportunity for Afghanistan. Recent events, including the unprecedented ceasefires and the preparations for upcoming elections, give us all reasons to be cautiously optimistic. We must do everything we can to make the most of this opportunity to end the violence. President Ghani's offer to the Taliban of talks without preconditions and the ceasefires over Eid al-Fitr are most welcome. The extraordinary images of soldiers and Taliban fighters embracing in the streets of cities across Afghanistan gave hope to millions of Afghans that an end to the conflict was achievable. The Afghan Government has shown an impressive commitment to peace. Now we need a similar commitment from the Taliban. The Taliban has to decide if it wants to be part of the future of Afghanistan. That seems to be what many of its fighters want. It is what the Afghan people want. It is time for the Taliban's leaders to show true courage and true leadership and to work for peace. Of course, the only solution to the conflict is an Afghan-led and -owned political process.

There are now four months to go until Afghanistan holds parliamentary elections in October. We welcome the progress so far on key electoral reforms and thank the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for supporting the Afghan Government in its preparations. Boris Johnson, the British Foreign Secretary, was in Kabul only yesterday, where he said that we encourage UNAMA to keep up the pressure on the Afghan Government and its electoral management bodies in order to ensure credible, inclusive and on-time elections. The United Kingdom and the wider donor community are also playing their part. We are encouraging the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission to deliver elections on time, with a focus on reducing the opportunities for fraud. We are particularly concerned about the fact that key positions in the Election Commission remain unfilled, and we call on the Afghan Government to appoint a new chief executive officer and provincial Complaints Commission commissioners without delay.

After the elections, the conference on Afghanistan to be held in Geneva in November will be an opportunity for donor countries and the Government of Afghanistan to take stock of the progress that has been made since 2016, and to ensure that the Government is on track to deliver on its reform commitments. It will also be an opportunity for the donor community and the Government to consider the future of international support beyond 2020.

At this moment of potential change, we should reflect on the progress that has been so far, particularly on the rights of women and girls. That is a personal priority for Britain's Foreign Secretary, who met with Afghan girls participating in a United Kingdom-funded sports education programme during his recent trip. Over the past six years, United Kingdom aid has helped 300,000 marginalized Afghan girls into education and trained more than 10,000 teachers. But there is some way to go to reach our goal of 12 years of quality education for all girls. The United Kingdom is contributing almost $1 billion in development funding in Afghanistan between 2016 and 2020. We will continue to work closely with our Afghan partners to promote opportunities for all Afghans.

I began by saying that this felt like a moment of opportunity for Afghanistan. There is a prospect of peace. Elections are coming that can help support peace and social stability. Let us stand beside our Afghan partners at this moment. Let us stand beside the Afghan people as they determine their own future.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Russian Federation.

We are grateful to today's briefers, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes, for their thorough analysis of the current state of affairs in Afghanistan. Their assessments confirm that the main barriers to stabilizing the situation in the country are the threats represented by terrorism and drugs. The conclusion to be drawn is that our fight against them must be uncompromising, and we must do it together.

The security situation in Afghanistan continues to be the most serious cause for concern. The Taliban controls a significant part of the country's territory. The insurgents' latest offensive raises serious questions about their willingness to begin peace negotiations. All of this once again convinces us of the damage that is done by relying on force to resolve the problem and on attempts to marginalize some regional stakeholders and bring in others. These kinds of balancing acts worsen

regional tensions and antagonize the very stakeholders who are capable of contributing to a settlement.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is a factor in this deteriorating situation. The group, which has as many as 10,000 fighters in its ranks, is already operating in at least nine of the 34 provinces, and increasingly often is organizing barbaric terrorist attacks with numerous terrorist casualties, including in Kabul, and continually consolidating its positions in northern Afghanistan, turning it into a springboard for further expansion into Central Asia. ISIL's establishment of camps for training militants, including fighters from Central Asian States, is particularly worrying. We must not keep silent about these facts.

Against this backdrop, we are again hearing accusations that Russia is supporting the Taliban. That is not new. This is something we have heard about frequently in the past few years, with practically identical wording every time and zero facts to back it up. We get the distinct impression that their true goal is to divert attention from the many real mistakes that have been made in Afghanistan over the past 17 years. One of the insurgents' sources of support is the military assistance supplied to Afghanistan by a number of our partners, which is provided without being properly accounted for and is frequently simply being stolen. We should point out that Western military experts have mentioned this too.

We have had no clear explanations of the unidentified helicopters transporting weapons and fighters for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) through Afghan airspace, which is completely controlled by our partners. The stubborn silence on this subject continues. Our demand that the situation be investigated without delay and this undisclosed practice cease still stands. We expect a proper report, not a form letter. And in general, we need to see more determined efforts from the Afghan authorities and the foreign contingents stationed there to clear the terrorists out of northern Afghanistan.

As Mr. Fedotov rightly pointed out today, the terrorist threat is inextricably tied to the drug problem. Afghan narcotics support the terrorists financially. In 2017, the acreage in the country under drug crops increased by 63 per cent and drug production doubled. All of this intensifies the drug threat both for Afghanistan and internationally. The situation clearly demands that we ramp up our collective efforts rapidly or risk letting this get out of control for good. We want to remind the Council that the Collective Security Treaty Organization — which has extensive experience in countering the drug threat, including through its Operation Kanal — is always ready to put its shoulder to the wheel in this area. At the same time, we believe that the Afghans themselves must play the decisive role. After all, it is the country's people who end up being the main victims of illegal business.

We welcome President Ghani's statement on the announcement and subsequent extension of the temporary ceasefire. It is important that these measures not be expanded to the international terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan, especially ISIL. We hope that the peace initiatives will give impetus to ending the fratricidal war in Afghanistan and to launching a peaceful dialogue and a process of national reconciliation. We strongly urge the Taliban to respond in kind.

We support the existing formats for national reconciliation in Afghanistan. However, we believe firmly that the principle of honest and equitable partnership, taking the interests of all the regional stakeholders into account, that forms the basis of the Moscow format and mechanism of the revived Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Afghanistan Contact Group, is ideally suited to the task of launching the negotiation process. In that context, we note the Contact Group's successful holding on 28 May in Beijing of its second meeting, in which the participants unanimously affirmed their readiness to promote interaction within its framework based on the protocol defining the priority tasks and modalities for the mechanism's work.

Parliamentary elections, followed by a presidential election, are approaching in Afghanistan. We support holding them on schedule and take note of the authorities' statement regarding the successful completion of the voter registration procedure. In the circumstances, it is more important than ever to keep to a balanced internal political policy.

We cannot allow Afghan society to become ethnically polarized or permit any infringements on the rights of minorities. The elections should be inclusive and a powerful force for consolidation, bringing Afghanistan one step closer to attaining full political and economic independence and returning it to the path of sustainable development. It is obvious to us that ensuring broad regional and international cooperation

will help to achieve that goal. Russia is ready for constructive work.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): I would like to express our appreciation to Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the Office of Counter-Terrorism, for their comprehensive briefings, and to Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, for his statement. We also thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2018/539).

Addressing the challenges to establishing sustained peace, stability and security in Afghanistan remains a central issue. We were pleased that the temporary ceasefire in Afghanistan during Eid Al-Fitr was respected. It was unprecedented, and images from all over Afghanistan testified to the Afghan people's desire for peace. In addition, the civic peace-tent movement is another illustration of our Afghan brothers and sisters' demand for peace. We call once again for an end to the violence. Turkey continues to stand ready to contribute to Afghan-led and -owned peace and reconciliation efforts. Access to education for Afghan women and girls is critical to promoting a culture of peace in Afghanistan and plays a central role in Turkey's assistance efforts there.

We take note of the findings of the Secretary-General's report on the efforts to ensure an inclusive and credible electoral process in Afghanistan. Ensuring that the upcoming elections are held successfully will be important to part of our efforts to help Afghanistan achieve stability, security and prosperity. But the low and uneven voter-registration turnout in the provinces is worrying, and swift and effective measures should be taken to rectify the situation. The fragmented political environment in Afghanistan is another area of concern. We join the Secretary-General in his call to all Afghan political stakeholders to act in a spirit of unity and work together to ensure credible elections and advance the peace process.

Enhancing collaboration among the countries of the region continues to be crucial, which is why Turkey continues to contribute to regional cooperation efforts for Afghanistan. This year, in line with our continued support for the country, we are co-chairing the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process. During the meeting for senior officials of the Process held in Istanbul in April, participating countries highlighted the importance of reviewing the implementation of confidence-building measures.

We also want to note the successful finalization of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, and hope that its expeditious implementation through working groups will help both countries deal with their numerous challenges.

We cannot overemphasize the importance for Afghanistan of consolidating the achievements of the past 17 years, which requires sustained support on the part of the international community for President Ashraf Ghani and the Afghan Government and people. We commend the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for its efforts to assist the Government and the people of Afghanistan in their endeavours to achieve a stable, peaceful and prosperous country.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate Turkey's commitment to continuing to stand by the Afghan people in their quest for a better future for as long as our help is needed.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Biagini (Italy): At the outset, I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto, Executive Director Fedotov and Under-Secretary-General Voronkov for their comprehensive briefings.

Italy aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the European Union.

The events of the past few days and weeks have highlighted the fact that Afghanistan's security challenges remain extremely complex. International support, through the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, in which Italy participates and contributes as a Framework Nation, is therefore still essential. However, as many Council members have already noted in today's debate, we have recently been witnessing some truly encouraging developments. We welcome the courageous peace offer that President Ghani extended in February, as well as the announcement of a unilateral ceasefire for the last part of Ramadan and the

decision to extend it. For the first time since 2001, the ceasefire was also initially reciprocated by the Taliban. The political significance of these events is amplified by the unanimously positive reactions from both the Afghan population and the international community. In that regard, I would like to reiterate Italy's unqualified support for these initiatives, which we hope can serve as a catalyst for the peace and reconciliation process.

We encourage all actors and stakeholders to interpret these developments with the necessary caution but without losing sight of the hope for a peaceful future they have generated. This phase requires a heightened sense of responsibility from all sides, and we therefore urge the Taliban to react positively to President Ghani's peace offer. We have a window of opportunity that is manifest in the Afghan people's clear longing for sustainable peace, which can gain further momentum if all relevant regional and international actors work together constructively to remove the remaining obstacles to peace. Concrete cooperation among neighbours on confronting terrorism, drug trafficking and organized-crime networks remains essential. In that context, we welcome the bilateral dialogue between Kabul and Islamabad. Effective cooperation on issues of common interest can also help to significantly improve the prospects for peace.

Afghanistan is rapidly approaching a long election season, culminating in the presidential election scheduled to take place in 2019. The holding of free, fair, credible and inclusive parliamentary and district elections this October will be a crucial milestone for Afghanistan's democratic institutions, as well as in terms of delivering results for the Afghan people and will also be a tangible demonstration of the Government's commitment to reform in the run-up to the Geneva conference.

We appreciate the efforts that the Afghan Government and the relevant electoral institutions have made over the past few weeks to produce a noteworthy increase in voter registration, and it is encouraging that almost one third of those who have registered are women. In that context, I would like to reiterate the crucial importance of protecting and promoting women's rights. We encourage the Government to continue its efforts in that regard, since the gains made so far cannot be taken for granted, as shown in UNICEF's recent data on declining primary-school participation, while also taking into account the difficult security situation in many parts of the country.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our sincere appreciation for the important role and contribution that the Special Representative and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan provide in the framework of the international community's efforts to bring peace, stability and development to Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): I would like to start where my Italian colleague just ended, by thanking Mr. Yamamoto for his work and his very comprehensive briefings. I fully endorse his assessments in the matter before us today. He has Germany's support for his work. Listening to the discussions this morning, I get the impression that there is a general convergence of opinions. In terms of the assessment, everybody here seems to share the view that, to summarize it, the glass is both half full and half empty.

With regard to the half-full part of the glass, the clear highlight of recent days and weeks has been the initiative taken by the President of Afghanistan and the Afghan Government to propose a ceasefire during the Eid festivities. This was a grass-roots movement, and the images circulated of people longing for peace were noteworthy. Another positive development is that the President continues to say that he is ready to engage in peace talks with the Taliban without preconditions. Also on the positive side, as many have highlighted, is the encouraging improvement in cooperation with Pakistan, and we welcome the finalization of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity. Now, of course, we need that dialogue to continue and be implemented so that it actually bears fruit.

Also, with regard to the glass half-full, the election registration process is very encouraging in some areas. Yes, it is a positive development that, as my Italian colleague just said, one third of registered voters are women, but our goal must be 50 per cent.

An example of the glass half-empty is the ruthless behaviour by the Taliban to stop this ceasefire. Like our American colleagues, we condemn this behaviour. We think it is very cynical and brutal behaviour by the Taliban. It must reconsider, so I hope that the Government will remain prepared to discuss this.

The two briefings we heard this morning were also more on the half-empty side. Mr. Fedotov gave an alarming account of the opium-production situation.

This is terrible, given everything that drug production has as a consequence. Mr. Voronkov also gave a very depressing account of the figures involved in terrorist attacks.

Also, on the elections, we have to ensure that all posts in the Independent Election Commission are filled, that everything is done to remedy the regional imbalances in voter registration and that the elections go ahead as planned.

I want to highlight, with respect to the glass half-empty, what Mr. Yamamoto said with regard to women and violence against women. This was highlighted by several representatives, including our French and British colleagues. More has to be done in that respect. I urge the Government to put this issue high on the agenda. The representative of Afghanistan said in his intervention that they are working on it, but I think that more has to be done to ensure the inclusion of women in the political process and address the issue of crime. This must not happen, so maybe the presidency in charge of the next debate could think about additional briefers. We have addressed the issues of terrorism and drugs, so maybe we could focus on the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, or children and armed conflict, and the Security Council could concentrate on these issues.

What we need, of course, is economic development and investment in the country. We need to create jobs so that there is an alternative to drugs. For this to work, there is one recipe: good governance. It is very important that the Afghan leadership and President and all involved work together as a team. We must continue to build institutions and an independent judiciary. We also must work very hard to end corruption, and we urge the Afghan Government once again to implement the recommendations contained in the recent report.

This, I think, is what needs to be done. The Afghan Government bears a great deal of responsibility. We are, of course, aware that it cannot shoulder this alone, but I think that it has to assume the corresponding responsibility.

Germany will continue to support the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the United Nations agencies working in Afghanistan. I do not have the figures on how much we spend, but we have from the very beginning had at least 1,000 soldiers there. We are in Mazar-e-Sharif with many other countries. We have for many years provided economic support totalling hundreds of millions of euros — billions, probably, by now — so we will continue to provide support in close cooperation with the Afghan Government and our international partners. When Germany comes into the Security Council next year, it will continue to pay special attention to Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Bonser (Canada) (*spoke in French*): Canada thanks the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for its ongoing work in the country. We also thank Special Representative Yamamoto, Executive Director Fedotov and Under-Secretary-General Voronkov for their very enlightening briefings.

Today I will address three main points: the empowerment and rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, the upcoming elections, and Canada's commitment to the peace and reconciliation process.

(*spoke in English*)

First and foremost, Canada is committed to advancing gender equality and empowering women and girls in Afghanistan. In May, Canada's Minister of Status of Women, Maryam Monsef, spoke via video at the fifth Afghan Women Symposium about our approach. I echo Minister Monsef in stating that Afghanistan has made considerable progress on gender equality. Canada welcomes the work of the Afghan Government to ensure the full implementation of the 2009 Elimination of Violence against Women Law.

Still, there is much work to be done to enable the full participation of women and girls in social and political affairs. Canada directly supports education, health-care and human rights programmes in Afghanistan. In all of these programmes we place primacy on ensuring that women's and girls' rights are advanced through them. For example, we have established more than 9,200 community-based schools in rural and remote areas of Afghanistan so as to increase girls' access to basic education. More than 80 per cent of the 273,000 students in those schools are girls. In Afghanistan, it is crucial that women and girls be included as equal participants in all decision-making processes.

This brings me to my second point: the need for fair and peaceful elections. Canada supports the meaningful inclusion of women as both candidates and voters in October's elections. However, we are deeply concerned by the security situation and the effect it has on the

ability of citizens to exercise their democratic rights. In many cases, election-related security incidents are occurring at schools and mosques used for voter registration. This is simply unacceptable.

The credibility of the elections process is dependent on the ability of voters and candidates, regardless of gender, to participate without being subjected to violence and harassment. We ask that all parties to this conflict respect the right of everyday citizens to participate in the election process. Canada supports the efforts of the Afghan Government and looks forward to democratic, transparent and peaceful elections in the coming months.

Finally, it is important to address the need for peace and reconciliation, and the inclusion of women in this process. I would particularly like to recognize Uzbekistan's efforts to promote peace through the Tashkent conference. Afghan-owned and Afghan-led efforts towards peace that are bolstered by regional support will benefit the stability and prosperity of us all. Canada also applauds President Ghani's courageous announcement on 16 June that the Afghan Government intends to extend its ceasefire. We support the Afghan Government's call to the Taliban to agree to another ceasefire and to join peace talks.

Canada supports Afghan-led efforts towards peace and regional stability. We commend Afghanistan and its partners for their work to increase gender equality, ensure fair and peaceful elections, and promote peace and reconciliation initiatives.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this debate on Afghanistan following the first ceasefire in the last 17 years. We welcomed this development and expressed our hope that this would lead to lasting peace. I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his informative briefing and tireless efforts at the head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and I also thank Mr. Yury Fedotov and Mr. Vladimir Voronkov for their briefings.

Japan welcomes the steady implementation of the Secretary- General's strategic review, which was issued in August last year and endorsed by the Council in its resolution 2405 (2018). The strategic review's insightful findings provide a path forward for UNAMA to help create a future for Afghanistan where sufficient stability exists to allow for a focus on institution-building and development activities. Japan looks forward to actively taking part in the forthcoming Geneva ministerial conference on Afghanistan to be co-hosted by the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations, where we will discuss the strategy towards sustainable peace and self-reliance in the country.

The Government of Japan welcomed the recent announcement by President Ashraf Ghani regarding the ceasefire with the Taliban. Even if temporary, a cessation of hostilities is a positive step for peace. Long-standing instability and conflict have left Afghanistan unable to realize its full potential.

Japan, together with key stakeholders, took part in the second Kabul process meeting and the Tashkent conference, and expressed support for the Government of Afghanistan offering to the Taliban its plans for talks without preconditions.

Despite the recent ceasefire announcements, regrettably, we have not observed any concrete step toward such talks. The international community must keep urging both sides to extend their ceasefires for the sake of the Afghan people and to engage with each other on starting a more formal process.

Parliamentary and district council elections, to be held on 20 October, will be a critical test for the Government of Afghanistan. While we are aware of the ongoing preparation process by the Independent Election Commission and of strong support by UNAMA, there remain administrative and security challenges. The international community awaits the outcome of credible and inclusive elections, and we are ready to extend assistance. However, the most important thing is that elections must be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned. I appreciate the update provided today by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mr. Yamamoto, and ask him to keep us informed and to provide the international community with concrete suggestions as to how we can support the ultimate goal of inclusive elections.

Japan reiterates its commitment to assisting Afghanistan on its path toward a peaceful, stable and self-reliant future. The ceasefire offered a brief vision of what the future would look like. Achieving that vision is our goal, and we should not miss any opportunity to get there.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): Let me start by thanking the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/539) and Special Representative Tadamichi Yamamoto for his very insightful briefing this morning.

The Secretary-General's report notes that Afghanistan continues to face multiple political economic and security challenges in an uncertain and fraught environment in which the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. It also underscores the risks posed to the forthcoming elections by declining public confidence in a fragmented political landscape. But despite that bleak picture, this month has seen a ray of hope emerge for peace in the country. A three-day see a ceasefire between Afghan security forces and the Taliban on Eid al-Fitr resulted in an unprecedented pause in a war that has raged for almost 17 years. Even if the ceasefire lasted only a few days, it marked a moment of hope and opportunity. Eid saw extraordinary and moving scenes of reconciliation in some places between those who for years had fought a bloody war against each other. The comprehensive observance of the ceasefire by the Taliban also demonstrated that its leadership has control of the movement and is cohesive enough to negotiate a political settlement.

It is also significant that both President Ashraf Ghani and the United States Secretary of State have indicated that foreign forces can be a topic of negotiations in any talks with the Taliban. This could open the door for real dialogue.

My country has consistently advocated over the years that a negotiated settlement is the only viable solution to the decades of conflict and suffering in Afghanistan. We have therefore welcome President Ashraf Ghani's offer to talk to the Taliban without preconditions and the United States support for a negotiated settlement. The ceasefire earlier this month has demonstrated that negotiations are not only possible, but can actually produce a positive outcome. The opportunity that has opened up by recent developments must now be seized and translated into serious and sustained efforts to promote a political settlement and durable peace and stability in Afghanistan.

While the onus for seizing the moment rests on the parties directly involved in the Afghan conflict, Pakistan for its part will continue to do what it can to support all efforts to launch a credible peace process. My country's participation in all regional and international forums on peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan, including the Moscow format, is a reflection of our commitment and unflinching support for the peace process that brings all the parties together to work for a political settlement.

Pakistan can support any agreed format for negotiations that enables all directly engaged parties to talk to each other. We feel that the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, consisting of Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and the United States, remains a useful format to pursue a negotiated settlement. A Quadrilateral Coordination Group+ format can also be considered that brings all of Afghanistan's neighbours into the process.

A negotiated peace and national reconciliation are all the more vital to preventing the threat posed to Afghanistan, its neighbours and the global community by the presence of Da'esh and a conglomerate of terrorists, including the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and other groups that have adopted the umbrella of Da'esh. They need to be defeated decisively and urgently. We must not allow those groups to drive Afghanistan into another vortex of violence and instability, which would compound the threat to the region's stability.

Pakistan has extended all assistance at the political level, as well as through our robust counter-terrorism operations, to help promote peace and stability in Afghanistan. Pakistan's security is inextricably linked to peace and stability in Afghanistan. Pakistan has a vital interest in a peaceful, stable, united and prosperous Afghanistan. We stand ready to support Afghanistan in addressing the multiple challenges it faces, and in that spirit, Pakistan is engaged with the Afghan Government in a comprehensive manner in all political, economic and military spheres. A series of high-level visits by both our political and military leadership have taken place in recent months. Those exchanges have helped to create an environment of trust and inject a positive impetus in our bilateral relations.

The recently concluded Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity will provide a structured platform for engagement between our two countries. Its five working groups on political, economic, refugee, military and intelligence issues envision a abroad and sustained dialogue between our two nations. To strengthen defence cooperation,

Pakistan has offered support, including to equip Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, gratis training in Pakistan, as well as financing and supporting the construction of the border management infrastructure. For my country border management remains the highest priority, we are working with the Afghan Government on modalities to deploy military liaison officers on either side to coordinate counter-terrorism efforts and complement action against terrorist outfits on our side of the border. We must secure our border to prevent the cross-border movement of militants and terrorists. That can be achieved only through constant vigilance, effective management and real-time communications. Terrorists should not be allowed to provoke clashes between our border security forces.

Earlier this year, the ulema — our religious leaders in Pakistan — issued a religious edict, or fatwa, entitled "Message of peace from Pakistan", which unequivocally denounced terrorism and suicide bombings throughout the world. Religious leaders from my country also participated in the ulema conference that was held this past month in Indonesia, and we will participate in ulema conference of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation this coming month.

In conclusion, let me say that the international community has long been unanimous in its view that sustainable peace is achievable only through a negotiated end to this long-running war. Almost 17 years of the conflict waged by the world's most powerful military forces have not yielded a military solution. The path to peace in Afghanistan will be arduous, but it is achievable. As a first step, all the parties concerned must commit to a negotiated solution to the conflict, which offers the best chance to end the suffering of the Afghan people and restore peace to Afghanistan and stability to the region. We hope that the search for peace through a dialogue process will be the highest priority for the Afghan Government, the Taliban, the coalition forces, Afghanistan's neighbours and the international community.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Van Den Akker: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 28 member States. The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

First of all, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2018/539) and the strategic review. Our thanks also go to Special Representative Yamamoto, Mr. Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and Under-Secretary-General Voronkov for their respective briefings.

As stated previously on several occasions, the EU strongly acknowledges the crucial role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and all the relevant United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people, while encouraging peace and reconciliation, monitoring and promoting human rights and coordinating the international community's assistance. The EU wishes to have the closest possible relationship with UNAMA in a spirit of transparent and open cooperation on the ground and in international formats for the ultimate benefit of Afghanistan.

The EU supports President Ghani's peace offer to the Taliban extended at the February meeting of the Kabul process for peace and security. The recent historic ceasefires between the Afghan Government and the Taliban during Eid Al-Fitr have given the Afghan people much-needed respite from too many years of conflict. Popular support for that initiative was overwhelming. The gathering of Afghans from all sides — with Government officials, soldiers, members of the Taliban exchanging Eid Al-Fitr greetings and attending prayers together — has given a sense of what peace in Afghanistan could look like. The European Union commends both parties for honouring their commitments. President Ghani's decision to offer a 10-day extension of the ceasefire was another courageous step to make way for peace negotiations, and we call on the Taliban to reciprocate.

Meaningful and enduring peace in Afghanistan requires continuous and inclusive dialogue and engagement, and the EU is ready to support that process. In that light, the European Union supports the Kabul process for peace and security. High Representative of the European Union Mogherini, at the Tashkent conference on peace, security and regional development held on 28 March, offered EU support for peace negotiations and increased EU assistance for women's

empowerment, regional economic development and the reintegration of refugees and former fighters. The EU reiterates the importance of the Afghan Government and the Taliban moving towards a political settlement, which has to be Afghan-led and Afghan owned. Therefore, the Kabul process on peace and security should be the main international forum and vehicle to support such talks. Regional actors have an important role to play in facilitating the process.

The next ministerial conference on Afghanistan, to be held in late November in Geneva, will be an important opportunity to highlight linkages between a future reconciliation process and broader political, economic and social challenges. The conference will also take stock of the implementation of the Afghan Government's reform package committed to at the Brussels conference on Afghanistan in October 2016.

We support NATO-led Resolute Support Mission efforts to provide further training, advice and assistance to the Afghan security forces and institutions.

Respect for human rights and democratic elections continue to be a focus for the EU's dialogue with the Afghan authorities and the EU's actions in the country. Human rights form an integral part of the structured dialogue between the EU and Afghanistan under the Cooperation Agreement for Partnership and Development. In that context, the first meeting of the special working group on human rights, good governance and migration was held on 5 May in Kabul, during which we held a substantial and open discussion about a wide range of topics in the area of human rights and good governance. The discussions confirmed that Afghanistan has sound legislation in place in various areas, or is about to adopt such legislation in the near future. What is still lacking, however, is effective implementation. There is definitely room for improvement in many areas. During our dialogue, we identified some of the actions that need to be taken to ensure progress. Tangible measures against corruption demonstrating the political will to address the issue are of particular importance. Likewise, efforts to protect and further expand girls and women's rights and enhance their empowerment must continue.

The application of capital punishment remains a great concern for us, and the EU has underlined its principled opposition to any form of the death penalty. It has continued to call for an outright abolition of the death penalty in due course, beginning with an immediate moratorium as a first step. On the other hand, it is positive that the new Afghan penal code significantly limits the number of crimes to which the death penalty can be applied.

The upcoming parliamentary and district elections in October are of vital importance for the stability of Afghanistan. It is imperative that the elections take place according to schedule and in a credible, transparent and inclusive manner, in view of ensuring the credibility of Government reforms that will be presented at the ministerial conference in Geneva. The EU notes with some concern that actions remain to be taken to address delays in preparation for the elections and that there is a lack of outreach to the provinces and delays in setting up fully functional electoral institutions. All efforts must be deployed now to resolve those difficulties and make the holding of the elections possible within the announced time frame. The successful organization of the elections will be an important prelude to next year's presidential elections and can provide a firm foundation on which to begin preparations for that event. The EU and its States members remain committed to supporting the Afghan electoral process, and the EU has pledged €15.5 million to assist the parliamentary and district elections, together with other members of the international community under the coordination of UNAMA.

The EU and Afghanistan are continuing their comprehensive dialogue on migration. The latest discussion on the Afghanistan Joint Way Forward took place on 6 May, at which Afghanistan reiterated its commitment to the implementation of the Joint Way Forward and underlined the importance of dignified, safe and orderly returns and for special attention to be paid to vulnerable groups. That is something the EU and its States members agree upon, and we reiterated the fact that the implementation of the Joint Way Forward must be continued in a spirit of partnership, while taking into account each party's sensitivities.

At the same time, the regional dimension of migration remains high on the EU's agenda and is being addressed in the political dialogue, as well as through financial assistance. The EU has made a strong commitment to address the key challenges of irregular migration and forced displacement in Afghanistan, as well as in the region, and to work towards finding a comprehensive regional solution, while focusing on the root causes of migration and ensuring the sustainable reintegration of returned Afghan nationals

within the country. To that end, the EU has continued the implementation of the two regional programmes targeting migration and regional displacement in Asia.

From 1 January to 31 March, UNAMA recorded 2,258 civilian casualties in Afghanistan, reflecting a similarly high casualty toll as compared to the first three months of 2016 and 2017. The persistently high levels of violence and its corresponding impact on civilians remains a deep concern for the EU. It is extremely worrying that the proportion of women and children killed and injured remains high. We call on all parties to protect the civilian population, especially women and children. Conflict-related violence also destroys livelihoods, homes and property, displaces families and limits access to education, health and other services. We need to continue to protect the vital role of humanitarian agencies and respect their impartiality and the humanitarian space in addressing the most urgent needs of the most vulnerable.

In conclusion, it is important that the international community remain strongly committed to supporting Afghanistan in its pursuit of long-term peace, security and stability. The EU expects that the recent initiatives of President Ghani and of the Afghan Government will lead to the establishment of a genuine peace process. The EU continues to consider UNAMA a key partner in achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan. UNAMA has an invaluable role in ensuring the broadest possible international support for an Afghan-led and -owned process. The EU will continue to support those efforts with all the means at its disposal.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Bird (Australia): Australia takes this opportunity to congratulate the Government of Afghanistan on President Ghani's 16 June decision to extend the unilateral ceasefire for the remainder of the holy month of Ramadan and for Eid Al-Fitr. The Afghan people overwhelmingly supported the cessation of hostilities, and the ceasefire has given hope that a lasting peace may be possible.

Australia has also welcomed President Ghani's invitation to the Taliban at the 28 February meeting of the Kabul process for peace and security cooperation to engage in negotiations without preconditions and without the threat of violence. President Ghani's offer and the ceasefire in June are bold steps that reflect the aspirations of the Afghan people. Australia underscores its disappointment that the Taliban thus far has chosen not to match President Ghani's bold thinking.

We deeply regret the continuing violence outlined in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/539) and the role of the Taliban and other insurgent groups in engaging in a series of heinous and cowardly attacks targeting Afghanistan's civilian population. We condemn the brutal attacks by insurgent groups and the actions of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) and ISIS-inspired groups, Al-Qaida, its affiliates and other terrorist groups in Afghanistan. Together with our allies and partners in the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission, Australia remains committed to supporting the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces to meet the challenges presented by those groups.

Throughout the years of conflict, the Afghan people have demonstrated their steadfast commitment to building a better society in which the voices of all of its members can be heard. The parliamentary elections, now scheduled for October, will be another important step in that process. We are encouraged that, despite ongoing violence and intimidation, voter registration has been increasing. Conducting parliamentary elections in October will be crucial for political credibility. We encourage the Afghan Government to maintain its efforts to hold inclusive elections, and we welcome the commitment of the United Nations to supporting those elections.

We also look forward to further discussing the Afghan Government's plans for the upcoming November ministerial conference in Geneva to advance Afghanistan's economic and social prosperity.

In addition to its many other challenges, we note Afghanistan is facing a crisis, an imminent drought that could affect two thirds of the country. An estimated 1.4 million people are likely to need emergency food and nutrition assistance. Australia will continue to help respond to that challenge.

International efforts in Afghanistan are supported by a strong United Nations presence. Australia values the role that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, ably led by Special Representative Yamamoto, plays in guiding and coordinating international support in Afghanistan.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to thank the Russian presidency of the Security Council for organizing this meeting, Ambassador Saikal of Afghanistan for his statement and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Yamamoto, for presenting his report (S/2018/539).

Unfortunately, as the report indicates, security continues to remain Afghanistan's major challenge. Improving its security is one of the main requirements for long-term stability and socioeconomic development. In order to confront that challenge, the National Unity Government of Afghanistan needs the robust and sustained support of the international community. That is of the utmost importance if we are to establish lasting peace and stability in that part of the world.

As a neighbouring country, Iran has been steadfast in supporting and promoting Afghanistan's security and stability, as well as its socioeconomic development, which are all very closely interlinked. Our support for the Afghan National Unity Government is unrelenting. We welcome any progress on the path to an Afghan-owned and -led peace process leading to lasting and comprehensive peace. It is in that context that Iran welcomes and participates in the Kabul process for peace and security cooperation and similar processes to help bring peace and security to Afghanistan.

Iran welcomed the recent temporary ceasefire announced between the Government and the Taliban, as well as the Government's good faith efforts to ensure its continuation. We also welcome the recent positive developments in relations between our two neighbours Afghanistan and Pakistan. We hope they will continue and that the relations will be further strengthened.

Terrorism and extremism are not only a threat to Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries, but also to regional and international peace and security. Counter-terrorism efforts must be given the highest priority. In the same vein, supporting Afghanistan's counter-terrorism measures advances regional and international peace and security. In that regard, we believe that the growing threat of Da'esh and its affiliates in Afghanistan should not be underestimated.

As we approach the elections in Afghanistan and take into account the role that successful elections could play in strengthening the political institutions and national unity in the country, improved security conditions become more relevant and essential.

Iran also attaches great importance to promoting regional cooperation in support of peace, stability and development in Afghanistan. We welcome the continued work of the joint committees entrusted with formulating a comprehensive framework agreement for bilateral cooperation. We hope that will soon lead to the agreement's conclusion, ensuring sustained and increasing cooperation between the two countries. The ongoing efforts in the port of Chabahar will have a significant impact on promoting trade and economic cooperation with Afghanistan. Any attempt to disrupt that vital project will play into the hands of those who do not want peace and progress for the Afghan people. We need unconditional international support for such innovative projects.

We believe that special attention should be paid to combating the interlinked sources of insecurity and instability in Afghanistan, particularly the production of, and trade in, narcotic drugs as a major source of income for terrorists, extremists and illegal armed groups. Accordingly, the international community must support the relevant international and regional projects and activities, especially the tripartite initiatives by Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, to fight the menace of narcotics.

We continue to support the dedicated work of UNAMA and United Nations agencies in providing reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan. Sustained ownership and partnership with the Afghan Government are needed in order to utilize the best potential of UNAMA and the United Nations system to deliver the necessary services in priority areas, as requested by the national Government.

As always, I would like to conclude my statement by expressing Iran's solidarity with the fraternal people of Afghanistan and by reassuring them of our full support in their challenging endeavour to achieve peace and prosperity in their country.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Akbaruddin (India): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this timely consideration of the situation in Afghanistan.

The focus of the international community on Afghanistan has been unremitting since the start of

this year. The Security Council visited Afghanistan in January. A ministerial debate on Afghanistan and regional connectivity was organized by Kazakhstan in the Security Council (see S/PV.8162). Several international and regional conferences have been held to address aspects of the issue. We therefore hope that this debate will continue to reflect the unceasing commitment of the international community to Afghanistan. We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mr. Yamamoto for sharing his insights, Mr. Fedotov for providing the perspective on drugs and crimes and Mr. Voronkov for emphasizing the counter-terrorism dimensions. We also express our sincere appreciation of Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal's articulation of the challenges with which Afghanistan is confronted.

Listening to the briefings, it is obvious that the events of hope that are being discerned need to transform into a process if the situation in Afghanistan is to take a turn for the better. Sadly, the markers of progress on fundamental concerns about the situation strike a sombre note, whether in terms of the suffering of the ordinary people of Afghanistan, the senseless orgy of heinous killings by terrorists or the displacement of a conflict-weary people. Those aspects have a sobering impact by bringing us in touch with the harsh realities that the millions of people of Afghanistan face on a day-to-day basis.

Despite the much-appreciated peace offer of the Afghan Government, the offensive by the Taliban has taken many lives. Such offensives cannot but be planned and launched without the existence of safe havens in the neighbourhood of Afghanistan. Those supporting the terrorists targeting Afghanistan have not been deterred. Notwithstanding the efforts of the international community, there are still those that provide sanctuaries to support the dark agendas of terrorist organizations, such as the Taliban, the Haqqani network, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Al-Qaida, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed.

The same safe havens that sheltered Mullah Omar also sheltered Osama Bin Laden. Lest we forget, the terrorism problem in Afghanistan is not a local one. We do not need a catastrophe again to remind us that Afghanistan requires strong and steady international support in the elimination of the scourge of terrorism, which is a threat to global peace and security. Mr. Fedotov's presentation of the Taliban's involvement in virtually all aspects of the opium trade suggest that it is not only a political or terrorism problem but also one of organized crime. The Security Council therefore needs to build on the reference in resolution 2405 (2018) to the linkages between extremism, terrorism, drug production and the illegal exploitation of the natural resources of Afghanistan. It is time for the Council to look at options to better utilize the range of tools available to it to deal with those transnational networks of drugs, terrorism and crime.

For its part, India is aware of the resilience of the friendly people of Afghanistan. On the basis of Afghanistan's desire for robust, reliable and year-round connectivity and to improve trade and investment relations with prominent markets in the region and beyond, India has tailored its support as a development partner of Afghanistan to meet such requirements. In recent months, there have been significant developments as far as connectivity is concerned. Chabahar port in Iran was inaugurated in December 2017. The Indian grant assistance of 170,000 tons of wheat supplies to Afghanistan recently transited through Chabahar, highlighting the benefits of improved connectivity. The India-Afghanistan air freight corridor, established last year, has gained momentum in the first year of its operation. There are now cargo flights between Kabul, Kandahar, New Delhi and Mumbai. Thus far, such flights have carried more than 2,000 tons of exports from Afghanistan to India worth more than tens of millions of dollars. Encouraged by that, we have plans to expand the air freight corridor network to various other cities in Afghanistan and India.

Looking at the football on the table and the importance that you, Mr. President, have placed on the power of sport, I believe it important to mention the role of sportspersons from Afghanistan. The Persian poet and Sufi mystic Rumi once said that where there was ruin, there was hope for treasure. That seems to have been the case with the sportspersons from Afghanistan. They have left behind the memories of a time when sport was explicitly banned by the Taliban in Afghanistan. The national team of Afghanistan is the new sensation on cricket pitches globally. A few months ago, Afghanistan qualified for the next Cricket World Cup. They made their first foray as a test cricket-playing nation earlier this month, ensuring their presence among the best cricket-playing countries in the world. While having made cricket grounds in India their home base, Afghan cricketers have flourished.

However, we look forward to the day when we, too, can play cricket with them on their soil.

We appreciate the efforts of our Central Asian friends in assisting Afghanistan in the most difficult times. The efforts of Uzbekistan in organizing the recent Tashkent conference on Afghanistan and the continuous tireless efforts of Kazakhstan in working on Afghanistan-related issues in the Security Council are indeed significant and crucial to our collective efforts in the region. We will work with all those in the region that also believe that the interests of the Afghans are paramount in bringing about a lasting solution to the security situation through an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process.

Such efforts and those of partners from beyond our region all contribute to the indomitable spirit with which the friendly Afghan people are building their country despite the difficulties that they face. The Council, too, must incessantly contribute to that noble cause.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium associates itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union.

At the outset, I would like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto not only for his briefing but also for his tireless efforts towards lasting peace in Afghanistan.

In the most recent debate on Afghanistan in the Security Council (see S/PV.8199), Belgium welcomed and supported the historic peace offer made by President Ghani and his National Unity Government. That offer was supported by the countries of the region, as well as the international community, including at the Tashkent conference on 27 March. Despite the annual launch of the Taliban's spring offensive, the offer has found deep resonance across the country in a civic movement for peace and reconciliation. Another essential contribution to peace was made on 14 May with the agreement on the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity between those two countries.

Belgium notes with satisfaction the announcement that parliamentary and district council elections will be held on 20 October. It is important that that date be kept. Belgium notes the significant efforts of the Government, as well as the courage of the population, to register for the elections. It is also essential that women have an opportunity to participate in the elections both as voters and as candidates. The process leading to the holding of elections must be inclusive, transparent and credible.

It is also very important to underscore that necessary reforms must continue in Afghanistan, as outlined in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/539). Belgium welcomes the fact that the effectiveness of the law to combat violence against women is being strengthened and encourages the Afghan Government to redouble its efforts in the fight against impunity. In that context, the implementation of the existing legal framework is key. The anti-harassment of women and children law, enacted on 31 December 2017, is a step forward in improving complaints procedures and clarifying what constitutes harassment in public spaces.

Since the beginning of the year, Belgium has been working alongside Afghanistan in the Human Rights Council. We welcome Afghanistan's accession to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, which is a strong sign of its commitment to human rights. I believe that we should underscore that fact as we mark the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. We welcome the offer of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to assist the Government in the practical operationalization of the commitments set out in the Protocol.

Belgium deplores the increase in the recruitment and use of children by parties to the conflict and supports the Secretary-General's call on all parties to put an immediate stop to such grave violations. They cannot go unpunished. We call on the Government to bring the perpetrators to justice and to assess how return and rehabilitation mechanisms can be strengthened.

Attacks on schools and medical centres continue. We thank UNAMA for the careful monitoring of those gross violations of international humanitarian law. Such attacks remind us that the efforts of all parties concerned to implement resolution 2286 (2016), on conflict and health care, must be intensified.

In conclusion, Belgium commends President Ghani and his Government on their unwavering commitment to peace despite myriad challenges. The ball is indeed in the Taliban's court.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Ibragimov (Uzbekistan): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's quarterly debate on the situation in Afghanistan. I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Yamamoto, Under-Secretary-General Voronkov and the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Mr. Fedotov, for their informative briefings.

It is obvious that prospects for sustainable development in Central Asia are closely linked to the achievement of durable peace in Afghanistan. Therefore, Uzbekistan continues efforts aimed at contributing to the stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan and its social and economic development, in accordance with the agreements reached at the international conference on Afghanistan held in Tashkent on 27 March. The event was convened at the joint initiative of the leaders of Uzbekistan and Afghanistan and attended by high-ranking officials from 21 States and leading international organizations, such as the United Nations, the European Union, NATO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Representatives of the five permanent members of the Security Council, members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as well as Afghanistan's neighbours and key regional countries that are actively involved in rendering assistance in economic recovery of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan were present at the Tashkent forum. The Tashkent declaration was adopted at the end of conference. I would like to mention some of its highlights.

First, the declaration demonstrates a consolidated position at the regional and global levels on the need for an early launch of direct negotiations between the Government of Afghanistan and the Afghan Islamic Movement of Taliban without preliminary conditions.

Secondly, the declaration defines the obligations of the opposing parties in the peace process. In particular, the document includes an appeal to the Government in Kabul to guarantee the integration of the armed opposition into the political life of Afghanistan and recognize it as a legitimate political force. In turn, the Movement of Taliban must recognize its own responsibility for peace and stability in the country, renounce violence, cut ties with international terrorist groups and respect the equal rights of all Afghans, in accordance with the main provisions of the Constitution.

Thirdly, the importance of the full support of the Afghan Government in combating terrorism, drug production and trafficking, as well as in taking resolute steps against all forms and manifestations of terrorism without any differentiation, was underscored by all participants.

Fourthly, all countries showed their respect for the sovereignty of Afghanistan and adherence to non-interference in its internal affairs.

Fifthly, the declaration also includes a separate paragraph devoted to regional economic cooperation. In particular, all participants underlined that, by promoting economic ties with Kabul, the countries of the region make their own contribution to ensuring stability and sustainable development in Afghanistan.

Based on the declaration, Uzbekistan is taking its own steps. The President of Uzbekistan has proposed to develop and implement efforts at the intra-Afghan, regional and global levels by developing a comprehensive peace programme for Afghanistan. At the intra-Afghan level, it is necessary to ensure the early launch, without preliminary conditions, of direct dialogue between the central Government and the main forces of the armed opposition, first and foremost the Movement of Taliban. Uzbekistan is ready to provide a platform for direct talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban in its territory at any stage of their development. In that context, the Uzbek side has held a series of consultative meetings and negotiations with the Government of Afghanistan and representatives of the United States, China, Russia, member States of the International Contact Group, States of the Eurasian region, South Asia, the Middle East and the Near East.

At the same time, the Uzbek side established appropriate contacts and held working meetings with high-ranking representatives of the Taliban Movement, during which prospects for dialogue and interaction to establish long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan and its economic development were discussed so as to realize the consolidated position of the participants of the Tashkent conference. On that basis, Uzbekistan welcomes the mutual introduction of a ceasefire between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban Movement in connection with the celebration of Eid Al-Fitr. The Uzbek side also welcomes the announcement by the President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, of the extension of the ceasefire.

At the regional level, it is necessary to ensure that a firm regional consensus is reached, primarily with the support of key regional players, including Central Asian States. That is critically important given that solving a number of key issues pertaining to economic development and security and stability in Afghanistan to a large extent depends upon neighbouring countries and their goodwill, firm determination and readiness to actively facilitate national reconciliation and end violence in Afghanistan. The efforts of all neighbouring countries and partners should not substitute but, rather, complement each other. It is important to develop and implement concerted measures, approaches and practical mechanisms to solve the problem.

At the global level, it is important that leading world Powers and donor organizations provide political support to the peace process and financial assistance for the socioeconomic rehabilitation of Afghanistan. Uzbekistan is making its own contribution to the process by expanding trade and implementing various projects. As a result, in 2017 the volume of trade increased by 15 per cent to a total of approximately $600 million. In the near future we intend to increase that number several times over and bring it to $1.5 billion. Uzbekistan has also initiated a number of joint infrastructure projects, such as the new Mazar-e-Sharif-Herat railway project, a project to construct the new 500-kilowatt Surkhan-Puli-Khumri power transmission line and the training of qualified national personnel for Afghanistan. An educational centre for the training of Afghan citizens has been in operation since last January in the Uzbek border city of Termez. In order to expand cooperation in the field of education, the President of Uzbekistan has proposed to establish a special international fund for supporting education in Afghanistan. The main goal of the fund is to assist Afghans in training national staff in in-demand professions, while providing scholarships and grants to talented students and young scientists.

In Uzbekistan we strongly believe that ultimately peace on Afghan soil will open up new opportunities and bring real benefits to all States of the greater Eurasian continent. It will advance common security and stability and create favourable conditions for the construction of highways and railroads, the laying of pipelines and the development of regional and trans-regional trade, thereby contributing to ensuring peace and stability in this vast region. Uzbekistan remains committed to continuing close cooperation with all stakeholders to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I would like to thank the members of the Security Council and the Secretariat for their participation.

The meeting rose at 1.40 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8295

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8295th meeting
Wednesday, 27 June 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Nebenzia	(Russian Federation)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Li Yongsheng
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Dah
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Temenov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alahmad
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Tenya
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Simonoff

Agenda

International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals

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18-19946 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Serbia to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2018/628, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Peru.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:
Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, France, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

Against:
None

Abstaining:
Russian Federation

The President (*spoke in Russian*): The draft resolution received 14 votes in favour, none against and 1 abstention. The draft resolution has been adopted as resolution 2422 (2018).

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements after the voting.

Mr. Tenya (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to take this opportunity to recall that international criminal law is vital to enabling access to justice, fighting impunity for atrocity crimes, deterring potential perpetrators and ultimately safeguarding human rights and promoting sustainable peace and the maintenance of international peace and security.

I want to stress the importance of maintaining the unity of the Security Council in its support for the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, which is mandated to fight impunity and contribute to reconciliation in countries where atrocity crimes have been committed. Compliance with that mandate depends to a great extent on States' living up to their responsibility to cooperate with the enforcement of sentences, implement warrants and respond to requests for assistance by the Residual Mechanism. In that regard, the Council can and must play its role as guarantor.

As Chair of the Working Group on International Tribunals, Peru would like to thank all the delegations that assisted and participated constructively during the consultations leading to the adoption of resolution 2422 (2018), which reflects the conclusions of the second review of the work of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, renews its mandate and appoints its Prosecutor. We are also grateful for the steadfast support that we have received from the Office of Legal Affairs and the secretariat of the Security Council, and offer our support and best wishes to the high officials appointed to the Residual Mechanism as they discharge their weighty responsibilities.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Russian Federation.

Our delegation abstained in the voting on resolution 2422 (2018), as it did in the voting on resolution 2269 (2016), on the same issue. At that time we voiced our grave concerns (see S/PV.7636) about the reappointment of the same officials from the unfortunately notorious International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Today our fears about those staffing decisions have been justified. The latest two-year cycle of the work of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals is drawing to an end, and its situation is far from perfect. There are problems with its approaches to justice and its internal administration and staffing policies. Our delegation expressed its opinion about those issues in the Security Council's meeting on 6 June (see S/PV.8278), and we will not repeat them now.

However, I would like to draw the Council's attention to one very serious issue concerning the right to life and the provision of timely and appropriate medical help to defendants. We repeatedly urged the

ICTY to conduct a serious inquiry into Ratko Mladić's treatment and, if it was beyond the prison doctors' capabilities, to temporarily release him for treatment in Russia with our comprehensive guarantees. Unfortunately, the Tribunal refused time and again to grant the motion of the accused's lawyers, and Serbia's guarantees were also rejected. The Mechanism rejected the most recent application for the General's temporary release on 8 June.

When we consider the materials in the Mladić case, which can be openly accessed on the Mechanism's website, some curious information emerges. Based on a document from the Registrar of the Mechanism concerning a report by independent medical experts, one can conclude that Mr. Mladić fears the doctors of the United Nations detention unit and does not wish to follow their prescribed course of treatment. At the same time, Mladić's lawyers are not allowed to be present during his visits with the prison doctors, despite the accused's wishes. The excuse they have invented is medical ethics.

What sort of medical ethics — based on trust between doctor and patient — are we talking about if, as the lawyers testify, the Mechanism's medical service has been hiding part of Mr. Mladić's electrocardiogram under stickers, effectively distorting his data? But even the medical information that the administration has been unable to conceal has enabled the defence to conclude that in the past three months the accused's health has got considerably worse. He is not getting adequate treatment, and the United Nations detention unit authorities are doing everything they can to protect themselves and justify their incompetence. This raises the question of whether the information that the judges are being given about the accused's health is similarly redacted.

The fight between Mr. Mladić's lawyers and the United Nations detention unit over his health has been going on for a number of months now. The Appeals Chamber and the President have denied every petition by the defence time and again. Things have gone so far that there is a petition to disqualify judges for reasons of bias.

In that connection, I would like to ask the Mechanism's leadership whether it realizes where this scandalous situation could lead.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Serbia.

Ms. Ivanović (Serbia): I thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to address the Council today on behalf of the Republic of Serbia.

At the outset, let me point out that Serbia fulfils all its obligations regarding cooperation with the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals. Serbia has proved its commitment to fighting impunity time and again. My country continues to be committed to prosecuting war crimes, regardless of the nationality of the perpetrators of grievous crimes against humanity.

I am here today for humanitarian reasons. We are concerned about the health of some of those who have been accused or convicted. I would specifically like to take this opportunity to draw the Council's attention to inadequate medical care in the case of Mr. Ratko Mladić. We feel compelled to do so because the Mechanism has rejected a request to release him temporarily for medical treatment despite the guarantees of the Government of the Republic of Serbia. As our Minister of Justice pointed out during the Security Council meeting on 6 June (see S/PV.8278), after months of delay the prison doctors eventually prescribed therapy for Mr. Mladić identical to that proposed by Serbian doctors much earlier.

Numerous official requests by members of Mr. Mladić's family and his defence team to gain access to relevant information about his health have been denied. They appear to have encountered a wall of silence, false claims and a lack of cooperation. The request for a medical team from Serbia to visit Mr. Mladić in prison, submitted in October of last year in accordance with rule 31 of the rules governing detention, was denied after a month of delay without any explanation or even a suggestion that the visit could take place at another time.

Our concerns are not unfounded. I would like to remind the Council that 12 Serbian nationals have died either during their trial before the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia or in prison during their sentences. It is difficult to believe that such a large number could have died in different prison units of The Hague Tribunal or on temporary release granted at a late

stage of illness under an official explanation that they have had fair treatment. Human rights are universal, and we believe that providing adequate health care is a question of basic human rights.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that Serbia has no outstanding issues with the Mechanism and that our cooperation with it is not hindered in any way.

The meeting rose at 10.15 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8296

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8296th meeting
Wednesday, 27 June 2018, 10.20 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Nebenzia	(Russian Federation)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Lie Cheng
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Dah
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Tenya
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the review of United Nations cross-border operations (S/2018/617)

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/619)

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18-19952 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the review of United Nations cross-border operations (S/2018/617)

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/619)

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. John Ging, Director of the Coordination and Response Division, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Mr. De Mistura is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Geneva.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in today's meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/617, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the review of United Nations cross-border operations, and document S/2018/619, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018).

I give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: I thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to address the members of the Security Council. When I last addressed the Council on 16 May (see S/PV.8260), I spoke of three bottom-line priorities: de-escalation, reviving the political process, and bridging the gaps between different groups of international stakeholders through high-level diplomacy because it is now time for high-level diplomacy. I would now like to report on where we stand on each of these elements.

First, with regard to de-escalation, I regret to say that I have very little to report, or rather, very little positive to report. In fact, I am gravely concerned at the turn of events, particularly in the south-west of Syria. In that area, now, while we are talking, we are seeing a full-scale ground offensive in aerial bombardment and exchanges of fire from both sides. I want to believe that the Security Council will not allow this to become another eastern Ghouta or another eastern Aleppo or Aleppo in general, where so many civilians were sacrificed and died. Yet I see things moving in this direction.

Let us be aware of what it would mean if the south-west were to see a full-scale battle to the end. It could be like Aleppo and eastern Ghouta combined in terms of the population in the areas that might be affected. Some 45,000 — almost 50,000, I hear — have already been displaced owing to fighting, mostly from eastern Dar'a governorate to areas near the Jordanian border. This year alone, more than 900,000 people in Syria have been displaced nationwide. It is unimaginable what the situation would be if we added to that number all those who are presently in the eastern Dar'a governorate. My colleague John Ging, whom I see is in the Chamber today, will brief the Council on these issues in greater depth in due course.

We must also think of the regional implications. As Secretary-General António Guterres himself has said, escalation in the south-west poses significant risks to regional security and stability, which is a point I myself have constantly underscored. In fact, regional tensions continue. Just to give Council members one example, on Monday of this week air strikes on Damascus airport were reported, which Syrian State media attributed to Israel. We are not in a position to independently confirm this, nor has Israel made any statement on the matter, but we are concerned that a full-scale battle in the south-west could only add fuel to this type of tensions. Our position on Aleppo, on Ghouta and on other places in Syria has always been to put the sanctity of human — civilian — life above all else.

We have seen months of intensified back-and-forth regional dialogue on the south-west, and we looked at it with interest because we saw and believed that there was some progress. I therefore urge all

parties — the Syrian Government, the armed groups and all interested parties — to draw on the lessons that we all learned from eastern Ghouta, from Ghouta, from Aleppo and elsewhere, and use the channels that already exist — and we know they exist and we know where they are — and work on arrangements that could prevent further human suffering, protect civilians and provide an exit from the potential for a further tragedy in this cruel seven-year-old conflict. I hope we will have an opportunity in private consultations to discuss this issue because we are indeed concerned.

With regard to the constitutional committee, we are beginning to see some movement towards a political process. That is why we are so concerned that military escalation could have the potential to compromise the progress that we are seeing on the political front. During the last month, we have intensified our efforts to find a way ahead for the implementation of the Sochi final statement for the establishment of a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, United Nations-facilitated constitutional committee within the framework of the Geneva process and in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

Four and a half months after the Sochi declaration, on 28 May the Syrian Government provided a catalyst when it conveyed to my office in Damascus 50 names for its Government list. I expressed appreciation to the Syrian Government for this important step. I have also expressed my appreciation to the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran, with which I know the Syrian Government has discussed this list and whose encouragement has helped to produce this movement.

After receiving the list, I decided to consult key regional partners in Istanbul, Tehran, Cairo and elsewhere, and I saw senior officials of the countries where those capitals are located, including President Al Sisi of Egypt, as well as officials of the Arab League and opposition leaders. I was in contact with the Russian Federation at several levels, the United States and European countries. On the basis of these useful discussions, I determined that it was now time to take advantage of this initiative of the Syrian Government, step up consultations and go deeper. On 19 June, therefore, I held formal joint consultations at a very senior level in Geneva with the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran. We discussed the best way to implement the Sochi final statement to establish a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned constitutional committee under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva.

I must say it was a constructive meeting. Much of the discussion concerned the composition of the committee as well as such issues as decision-making and how to avoid deadlocks. The aim was to seek some preliminary understandings. Participants exchanged opinions on these matters in a very interactive and constructive way. Some common ground actually emerged — preliminary, but it emerged. Overall, a spirit of productive negotiation and potential compromise emerged because all three countries recognized the need for a constitutional committee that is credible in the eyes of the international community.

On 22 June I met with an official from the European Union, who provided sound advice, and I will meet shortly with High Representative Mogherini on these issues tomorrow. On 25 June I hosted joint consultations in Geneva with, in alphabetical order, France, Germany, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States. We discussed the de-escalation arrangements in depth, a key element, obviously, that underpins progress on the political front. Views were exchanged on the importance of diplomatic bridging between different groups on Syria and prospects for progress on the constitutional track.

There was a clear expectation on the part of those countries — and let me be frank: they have an interest and a stake in the process and also are the ones who could be important players in any potential reconstruction — that any constitutional committee must be credible and internationally legitimate, it must contain a diverse and representative spectrum of Syrians, including those mentioned in the Sochi final statement, such as independence, civil society, experts and women.

Based on my consultations with many stakeholders, I intend to maintain my prerogative to contribute to adjusting the committee so as to ensure, first, its credibility and secondly, international legitimacy. In terms of women, let me underscore my own expectation that any constitutional committee must include a minimum of 30 per cent women. In this connection, I noted with pleasure that 26 per cent of those on the Government list of 50 names provided to us were women, which is not enough, because we are aiming for 30 per cent, but it is a very good signal. I will certainly not be impressed by the argument that others may raise that there are not enough Syrian women who are competent on constitutional issues. Just yesterday,

for instance, more than 200 Syrian women from diverse backgrounds met in Beirut for a conference organized by UN-Women. Despite their differences, they agreed on many points, including on women's equal participation in decision-making, including in any constitutional committee. I also take note of the recent letter of support for women's full and effective participation, with at least 30 per cent representation, in the constitutional committee, which was sent to us by the representatives of members of the Security Council Peru, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

We now await an opposition list of names, which we hope will be forthcoming shortly. I know that serious work on this issue is being conducted even as we speak. I will be proceeding also to facilitate the process of bridging independence experts, tribal leaders, civil society and women, as indicated in the Sochi declaration, and, frankly, in many of our common deliberations. I should add that both meetings in Geneva underscored one important point that I, too, will underscore: the support of key countries for the role of the United Nations in facilitating the political process in Geneva, including the constitutional committee.

Overall, these consultations represent a cautious step forward, and I have to be cautious, having seen how sometimes we took one step forward and two back. But let me be clear: this is a package, and that is something that we have discussed with everyone: nothing is agreed until everything has been agreed. That is why it is a work in progress. I am also aware that this process will require the consent and engagement of the Syrian Government and parties, with full respect for their concerns and sensitivities — the Government, the opposition and civil society.

For my part, I will continue to facilitate further movement in this direction to seek the support, counsel and advice of many, which is why I anticipate inviting the Sochi co-conveners back to Geneva in the coming weeks, as well as the six countries I saw Monday and others and then report back to the Security Council.

Let me also flag that if we are to move forward with a constitutional process towards what everyone in Syria tells us they want, a safe, calm and neutral environment, it will be important to start to see steps that could restore trust and confidence in social peace. That is why we are concerned when we see unilateral legislative acts such as Law Number 10, which we understand many refugees were very worried about, and frankly I even heard a great deal about this from neighbouring countries such as Lebanon.

We also urge concrete action on the issue of detainees. Today, even as we speak, a technical team from my office is in Ankara for a meeting of the Working Group on the release of detainees/abductees and handover of the bodies as well as the identification of missing persons, of which the United Nations is a member, together with Iran, the Russian Federation and Turkey.

As the Council is aware, so far the outcome has been zero. However, we are not giving up. Today's meeting is already the third meeting of the Working Group, which deals with a key humanitarian issue that affects thousands and thousands of Syrian people. What is necessary now and what we and the Syrian people expect are some concrete steps and results to alleviate the suffering of those affected by this tragic situation. Members of my team who are present in Ankara today will continue proactively to support the Working Group, which was established in Astana. I hope that all actors involved will demonstrate the political will required to produce some results in this field.

In the meantime, we continue to seek ways to bridge different groups of international stakeholders through high-level diplomacy. That is my bottom line, and we have seen that taking place. Serious, robust and sustainable dialogue is vital to underpin de-escalation, which is very much needed now, and the political process in general. I discussed this issue with President Al Sisi in Cairo when I was there, and he gave me some constructive ideas in this regard. I believe that we are already seeing an emerging web of high-level international discussions on Syria: frequent contacts between the United States and the Russian Federation, for instance, at many different levels; communications at a very high level between President Putin and President Macron and President Putin and Chancellor Merkel; and intensified talks between the United States and Turkey over various issues.

All that we can build on. I have shuttled around all relevant capitals recently, so I can say with some authority and confidence that there is some common ground to build upon that could provide a solid basis for some concrete understandings. Many countries are not that far apart on issues that are, frankly, easy to resolve or address, such as national sovereignty, unity and many others, and we have been working on it.

Let me reiterate once again that the United Nations stands ready to use its own good offices, competence and experience — and we have a whole team working on this — in the bridging of commonalities to contribute to facilitating international dialogue in the quest for such commonalities.

In conclusion, we are moving cautiously in the right direction on the political front. I ask for the support of all present, including of the Syrian Government, whose representatives are sitting in the Chamber, in facilitating this effort. Ultimately, this effort must be Syrian led and Syrian owned, because no country or organization can simply impose a fait accompli on the Syrian people. We know that, but we need to move forward.

My second message is that currently we are gravely concerned by the battlefield developments and their potential to expand into regional tensions. Therefore, we urge the Council and all interested parties to help find an arrangement or a solution in the south-west that will spare civilian suffering and large movements of displaced people and reduce the potential tension so that we do not see once again seven years afterwards, perhaps when we are getting closer to the end of the conflict, a repetition of what we saw sadly in Aleppo and eastern Ghouta.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ging.

Mr. Ging: Today I will provide the Council with an update on behalf of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Mark Lowcock.

I would like to start with the alarming developments in southern Syria where violence has escalated sharply last week and heavy artillery and aerial shelling is under way. To date, an estimated 45,000 to 50,000 people have been displaced owing to this fighting, most from eastern Dar'a governorate to areas near the Jordanian border. A number of villages either impacted or fearful of the proximity of the fighting have been almost totally abandoned. According to the World Food Programme, "the number of displaced people could nearly double if violence continues to escalate". Dozens of civilians have reportedly been killed, including children, and many more have been injured.

Attacks have also hit civilian infrastructure causing widespread damage, including an air strike yesterday that rendered a hospital supported by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Al-Hirak city inoperable. According to MSF, that hospital supported 90,000 people and provided more than 15,700 emergency room consultations in the past year alone. Another hospital in eastern Ghariyeh had to suspend operations owing to insecurity. In eastern Maliha, the local health centre and local council building were also both rendered inoperable.

This morning media reports announced that air strikes struck yet another health facility — this time in the town of Jizeh, east of Dar'a city. In addition, Naseeb hospital declared the suspension of its services and the Dar'a Education Directorate announced the adjournment of all classes and examinations. Some 100,000 people in Dar'a city and surrounding villages have been impacted by a complete electricity blackout, which occurred yesterday when Government forces launched an assault on the divided southern city.

Despite the hostilities, the United Nations and its partners continue to provide food, health care, nutrition, education and core relief items to more than 400,000 people in need in southern Syria from across the border in Jordan. Humanitarian partners supporting cross-border operations have been actively planning for such an escalation since the first quarter of the year and supplies are prepositioned in Dar'a and Quneitra governorates. Any further escalation will significantly increase the number of displacements and jeopardize the United Nations capacity to conduct further humanitarian operations. Today, the United Nations cross-border convoy, for example, had to be postponed owing to the bombardments that took place within kilometres of the Jordanian border. I recall in that regard the Secretary-General's own statement last week, underscoring "the fragile situation of civilians in southern Syria" and calling "for an immediate end to the current military escalation". I also call on all stakeholders to ensure that cross-border humanitarian deliveries continue in a sustained, safe and unimpeded manner to reach all those in need, including the newly displaced people.

In north-west Syria, particularly in Idlib, the humanitarian situation is increasingly dire. This is linked to the massive new displacements since late last year. More than half a million people have been displaced to and within Idlib in these past six months, whether from eastern Ghouta, northern rural Homs, Yarmouk or other parts of Idlib itself. There is a

growing concern around military escalation with 60 people reportedly killed by air strikes between 7 and 10 June alone, and armed clashes in the vicinity of the two most recently besieged communities in Syria, namely, Fo'ah and Kefraya. Moreover, improvised explosives have been detonating regularly throughout the area, with over 20 incidents reported in May and two recent incidents in Idlib city itself on 21 June, killing eight people and wounding another 40. In addition, a number of abductions for ransom of medical and health professionals was reported in June, which led local authorities to suspend non-emergency activities for several days.

In Raqqa city, the United Nations Department of Safety and Security and the United Nations Mine Action Service conducted an assessment mission on 13 and 14 June. While the United Nations remains concerned that contamination of explosive hazards makes the city unsafe for returns, an estimated 138,000 people have already returned to the city since the withdrawal of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in October 2017. Most returnees have settled in areas with comparatively less infrastructure and less explosive hazard contamination. There has been a reduction in the average number of blast-related casualties reported by health facilities from over 170 per month in November and December 2017, to an estimated 43 in April. That is the most recent data that we have.

Access to basic services within Raqqa city continues to gradually improve with hospitals reopening and electricity re-established in rural areas to the north of the city, as well as other infrastructure sites. The rehabilitation of the water network within Raqqa city continues at too slow a pace. Only 50 per cent of the city is reportedly receiving water through the network, and it is often in insufficient quantities. In neighbourhoods that do have access, the water network supply is often intermittent with concerns about poor water quality contributing to health risks. The United Nations and its implementing partners continue to provide humanitarian assistance to those in Raqqa city and throughout Raqqa governorate, reaching nearly 300,000 people every month.

Further to the west, 136,000 individuals are estimated to remain in Afrin district, including over 40,000 people in Afrin city. Another 134,000 individuals from Afrin district remain displaced in the Tell Rifaat subdistrict, Nubul and Zahra towns and the surrounding communities. Some limited return movements to Afrin district took place in May when some 3,000 to 5,000 individuals reportedly returned to that district.

The humanitarian access situation in Afrin district continues to improve, and while Turkey and the Turkish authorities provide the majority of the response in those areas, the United Nations — through its cross-border humanitarian partners — is also contributing to life-saving services and activities in the district. Based on a recent multisectoral rapid assessment conducted by humanitarian partners in May, needs are considered to remain very high, with most health facilities in rural areas closed, many service providers having fled the area and a large proportion of schools, markets and bakeries not yet functional, owing again to the presence of explosive remnants of war and the continued absence of staff, workers and tradespeople.

In Tell Rifaat and the surrounding areas, the United Nations continues to provide humanitarian assistance to the displaced populations mainly from its warehouses in Aleppo. However, additional assistance and services are required, particularly for the people in the rural areas and the internally displaced persons sites.

In eastern Ghouta, close to 16,000 people are reported to have moved back as of early June. Estimates indicate that there are currently 125,000 people living inside the enclave. The United Nations has largely been unable to access eastern Ghouta since the change in control in March. A visit to Saqba and Kafr Batna took place on 14 May, but a full assessment of needs is yet to be authorized by the Government of Syria. Assistance is being provided through the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and other local partners. A SARC convoy delivered United Nations assistance including, wheat flour for 60,000 people and food for 45,000 people, in Douma on 10 June. United Nations personnel were not permitted to accompany the convoy or conduct a needs assessment, despite the convoy being implemented under the agreed bimonthly inter-agency convoy plan. Moreover, two inter-agency convoys were deployed in May, namely, to the hard-to-reach locations of Talbiseh, in northern rural Homs, and Tlul Elhomor, in southern Hamah. As was the case for the convoy to Douma, United Nations personnel were not permitted to participate in the two convoys. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent delivered the United Nations multisectoral assistance for 92,750 people in Talbiseh, as well as food assistance for 12,000 in nearby Al-Jabriya village. Yesterday multisectoral assistance was delivered to

107,500 people in Al-Rastan, in northern rural Homs. Initially United Nations personnel were not authorized to accompany that convoy. However, following intense negotiations, including with the help of the Russian Federation, the Syrian authorities amended their decision to allow a United Nations presence, as well as the delivery of all medical and health items.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has documented reports of nearly 700 attacks on health facilities in Syria since early 2014, with 112 confirmed attacks already this year. We are now at par with the number of attacks registered for all of last year. That is more than 16 per month — one attack every other day, on average. Syria now accounts for nearly 70 per cent of all reported attacks on health-care facilities documented by the World Health Organization worldwide. According to WHO, it is "the deadliest place in the world for health workers". Let me highlight our efforts to prevent such attacks from occurring.

Since March, the United Nations has deconflicted more than 500 humanitarian premises and sites with the Russian Federation, the United States-led coalition against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, and Turkey. Those sites were deconflicted in an effort to prevent them from being targeted by mistake or incidentally. Yet four of those deconflicted sites — all of them health facilities — were hit, in eastern Ghouta and northern rural Homs on 20 March, 6 April and 29 April. That is four too many. We must all ensure that none of our deconflicted sites is hit or damaged unlawfully.

Late last year, the Council requested the Secretary-General to conduct a written review of United Nations humanitarian cross-border operations. A report (S/2018/617) was issued this past week. I will not go through all of its details and findings, but will make a few points on the impact of our cross-border operations on the people in need in Syria.

As the Council knows, nearly 5 million people are in need in areas that are more accessible via cross-border operations than from within Syria. Of those, 2.67 million people are in areas solely accessible via cross-border operations. Those are people without access to assistance from within Syria. From July 2014 to April of this year, a net total of 3.7 million people received food assistance, many of them on a monthly basis; 4.7 million people received sanitation and hygiene assistance; education supplies were delivered to 946,000 people; and nutrition assistance was provided to 611,000 people. Some 21.1 million medical treatments and procedures were conducted in 82 hospitals and 70 mobile clinics, which are operational and supported by medical supplies provided by the United Nations and its humanitarian partners through cross-border operations.

The year 2018 has seen a rapid evolution of the conflict, with shifts in control of territory, mass movements of people and nearly an additional 1 million people displaced. While geographical space for operations has shrunk as areas in the south-east of Idlib have transitioned in control, the size of the population being supported by United Nations cross-border operations has actually increased and the needs of people have become even more acute. For example, in 2014, when resolution 2165 (2014) was adopted, Idlib's population was estimated at 1.9 million. Today it stands at 2.5 million, with half of that number representing displaced people. Resolution 2165 (2014) was adopted out of a dire humanitarian need and imperative, with millions of people in need of assistance who were inaccessible from within Syria. As long as people remain inaccessible from within Syria, which remains the case today, cross-border humanitarian deliveries continue to be the indispensable lifeline for those millions of Syrians dependent on humanitarian assistance to survive.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Ging for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy De Mistura and Director Ging for their briefings this morning.

We are no closer to peace in Syria and no closer to addressing any of the Security Council's concerns about the Al-Assad regime's denials of humanitarian access. The situation in the south-west de-escalation zone has become extremely serious. On Monday during the Council's meeting on threats to international peace and security in the Middle East, the Russian representative said,

> "No one has done more than Russia ... [to] reduce the level of violence" (*S/PV.8293, p. 28*).

That is just not true. The United States is deeply concerned about the Syrian regime's new offensive in the south-west, with direct support from Russia,

where ongoing air strikes and barrel-bomb, artillery and rocket attacks are taking a significant toll on the civilian population. That is a part of the country that had enjoyed relative calm for almost a year because all parties were abiding by the de-escalation zone. But at least 45,000 people are now confirmed to have fled their homes in southern Syria since the beginning of the offensive, just 12 days ago. We are now hearing that that number might be as high as 70,000.

It is deeply alarming that we see are seeing an additional escalation in the south-west despite formal arrangements to keep that area calm. When Jordan, Russia and the United States established the south-west de-escalation zone last year, the terms were clear. Above all, there was to be a ceasefire that would allow the parties to engage in combating extremist and terrorist groups designated as such by the Security Council. The arrangement remains in place, and the United States and Jordan have upheld our commitments in good faith, but now the situation is changing. Once again, Russia is justifying a military offensive by the Al-Assad regime by saying that more than half of the de-escalation zone is controlled by terrorists. That is just not true. The predominant armed opposition groups operating in the de-escalation zone belong to the moderate Free Syrian Army. The de-escalation arrangement does not allow for military operations against its members. Rather, it only allows for combating the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, the Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaida and other terrorist groups as designated by the Council.

For years, the Al-Assad regime and Russia have justified brutal assaults on civilian populations and infrastructure, schools, bakeries and hospitals under the pretext of counter-terrorism. We are now seeing the same pattern in the south-west. The United States can confirm that Russia itself launched air strikes in the south-west de-escalation zone in recent days. To be clear, the unilateral military operations under way by the Al-Assad regime and Russia in south-west Syria represent a violation of the ceasefire arrangement reaffirmed by President Trump and President Putin. The United States remains determined to keep its commitment to the ceasefire. We urge our Russian partners to also uphold the ceasefire that it helped establish in partnership with Jordan and the United States. We further urge Russia to take immediate steps to de-escalate violence in the south-west and throughout the whole of Syria consistent with previous Security Council resolutions.

The Council has already witnessed the horrific suffering of the people of eastern Ghouta during a ruthless assault by the regime and Russia in which thousands were killed and displaced. Russia yet again appears to be choosing a military rather than a political option It is incumbent upon those sitting at this table, and the international community more broadly, to demand that this escalation of violence in Syria stop immediately. In addition, the offensive in south-west Syria is threatening the vital Al-Ramtha border crossing, which the Council has authorized for cross-border humanitarian deliveries. A closing of the crossing would inflict untold suffering on civilians who depend on life-saving assistance.

It is vital that cross-border humanitarian aid deliveries continue to serve the millions who depend upon them. In last week's report on cross-border humanitarian operations, the Secretary-General asserted that,

> "[t]he full and complementary use of all delivery options, both from within the country and from neighbouring countries, is necessary in order to gain access to people in need" (*S/2018/617, para. 29*).

Because the regime routinely fails to facilitate humanitarian assistance and often removes medical items and other aid from convoys, it is vital that the Council use its authority to support the continuation of cross-border operations. Alternative proposals from Council members on implementing a new humanitarian operations mechanism that requires the Syrian regime's approval are out of step with reality. Most importantly, those new proposals will harm the Syrian people. We cannot put humanitarian assistance and the cross-border mechanism that ensures its delivery in jeopardy.

As always, the need for a political solution to end this crisis is obvious. The United States urges that a constitutional committee be formed as quickly as possible under United Nations auspices. If such a committee is to work and lead to a lasting settlement, it must be inclusive. That is why we support the efforts of the United Nations to include representatives of civil society, women and the opposition from the Syrian negotiations committee. The United Nations must be given a free hand to determine the committee's composition, scope of work and schedule. The statement from Russia's conference in Sochi in January makes it clear that the United Nations has

the authority to make decisions about who sits on the constitutional committee, and that must be respected. Lastly, we reiterate our commitment to the Geneva process and the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). Geneva remains the sole legitimate venue for a peaceful resolution of the Syrian conflict. Council members around this table often reiterate that message, but actions on the ground appear to suggest that some are hedging their bets and seeking to create alternatives to Geneva. We must not delay progress on the political process any further.

The fact that we were able to work with Russia on a de-escalation arrangement that held for nearly a year shows that when we have the political will we can help reduce violence and suffering in Syria. Progress is possible, and that is why the United States remains committed to the de-escalation agreement and to working with the Council to support peace in Syria. Like Special Envoy de Mistura, we will not give up.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his comprehensive and objective briefing. We assure him of our full support. I also thank Mr. John Ging for his instructive briefing on the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Syria.

I will start with our concerns about the situation on the ground, particularly the ongoing offensive in south-western Syria. I will then touch on the extremely dire humanitarian situation. Finally, I will emphasize that the situation makes it even more essential to launch an inclusive political process capable of uniting Syrians.

The relentless logic of military operations continues in Syria. For the past week we have seen the regime resume its attacks on the opposition in south-western Syria, in a region inhabited by 700,000 civilians. There have been several air attacks on the city of Dar'a since 23 June. This relentless strategy, which represents the worst possible outcome for the civilian population, is sadly familiar. As in Damascus, Homs, Aleppo or eastern Ghouta, the goal of the air attacks is to force the opposition groups to surrender using methods of war that are contrary to humanitarian law. Another operation in southern Syria is paving the way for new sieges that will starve out the population and result in more forced displacements and restrictions on humanitarian assistance. Moreover, that offensive is in an extremely sensitive border area and could have direct consequences for the security and stability of Israel and Jordan. In that connection, I would like to recall France's commitment to the security of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, in which the Blue Helmets operate under difficult conditions in the Golan Heights, and which should be maintained at all times. Another wave of refugees could destabilize neighbouring countries for the long-term, particularly Jordan, which has already taken in so many Syrians.

These developments are all the more worrying given that the diversity of the forces present in south-western Syria presents a real risk of regional escalation. The territories targeted in the offensive are part of the de-escalation zone in south-western Syria established by the United States, Russia and Jordan in July 2017. France therefore calls on everyone, beginning with the Russians, to honour their commitments in order to put an immediate end to the offensive. Russia must honour the agreement reached a year ago and immediately ensure the cessation of hostilities.

In this troubling context, the continuing catastrophic humanitarian situation is deplorable. In Idlib, eastern Ghouta and elsewhere, the humanitarian situation continues to be particularly alarming. Very rarely do convoys have access to the population, while the needs of the population are immense. The regime is taking on a particularly grave responsibility in that regard. The systematic and deliberate obstruction of humanitarian aid is unacceptable, especially the Syrian regime's systematic removal of medical materials from convoys, including vaccines for children. The influx of displaced persons renders the situation even more critical, particularly in Idlib. All the parties must guarantee total and unhindered humanitarian access, coordinated by the United Nations, and, finally, medical infrastructure and personnel, which are still being attacked, must be protected.

I welcome the Secretary-General's report on humanitarian cross-border assistance (S/2018/617 and S/2018/619). Cross-border assistance continues to play a vital role in enabling aid to be sent along the most direct routes. The mechanism is transparent, effective and fully dedicated to the people in need. The neighbouring countries have given the mechanism their unequivocal support and call for it to continue. It is therefore our responsibility to ensure that it is preserved.

Considering the risk of the fatigue over this issue that peeps through here and there, we must all realize that we cannot turn away in the face of the

continuing military operations and humanitarian disaster in Syria. We must be particularly careful not to let the potential next chapter of the Syrian tragedy, the regional expansion of the conflict, be written. These problems make launching a credible political process more urgent and necessary than ever. It may be too soon for a Syrian Dayton agreement, but we are seeing the first encouraging signs of a true political process. The road map is clear. We must fully support the efforts of the United Nations in Geneva to promote areas of convergence among the primary parties in the Syrian crisis.

In that regard, the discussion on 18 June between Mr. de Mistura and the three Astana guarantors, followed by another on 25 June with the members of the Small Group of the Global Coalition, should enable the launch of a constructive dialogue with a view to reaching a lasting and credible political solution in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). The short-term goal is the establishment of a constitutional committee. We are encouraged by the willingness of the parties to work constructively for the establishment of such a committee, composed of one third members designated by the regime, one third opposition members and one third independents. This is a modest but necessary stage that is showing initial progress of a kind we have not seen for months and that could potentially be a turning point towards a true political process. We hope that is the case. That is why we are encouraging the Special Envoy to continue to work actively on appointing the 50 independent representatives in order to ensure that neither the regime nor the opposition has a majority. We urge him to define the modalities of work for the committee as soon as possible.

The demanding path towards a political solution based on an intra-Syrian agreement also requires the holding of free and transparent elections, organized and monitored by the United Nations, enabling all Syrians, in Syria and abroad, to have a voice, and with the active participation of women in the political process. In that connection, France supports a 30 per cent minimum participation rate of women in the process.

Those two elements — the constitutional aspect and the elections — require a neutral, secure and impartial framework for the Syrians to express themselves freely that is guaranteed by confidence-building measures. That is the very aim of the efforts under way by France and its partners to ensure coordination between the Small Group of the Global Coalition and the Astana process. Our goal is not to create a process devoid of substance but to bring together the efforts of the parties with leverage in Syria to better support the mediation of the Special Envoy.

During the debate the day before yesterday (see S/PV.8293), the Russian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and Director of the Middle East and North Africa Department, Mr. Sergey Vershinin, advocated a political settlement of the Syrian crisis through constructive dialogue. Based on the shared conviction that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict, let us be mindful of working jointly for a lasting political solution.

It is high time that we unite behind the United Nations process in Geneva. That is in the interests of us all, above all the Syrians. In that regard, France is ready to engage with the Russian Federation and all actors with leverage, whether on the ground, on the economic front or in international bodies, in order for the United Nations mediation to succeed. We believe that today that is possible. Let us get to work. There is no time to lose.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura and Mr. John Ging for their briefings. Through them, allow me once again to thank their teams on the ground, which are doing good work in very difficult circumstances.

As there was positive news on the political front and as we do not often have such news, I would like to start by talking about that. We are very grateful to Mr. De Mistura for his leadership and everything that he has done to drive the political process forward. I think that the recent meetings of the Astana guarantors and the Small Group of the Global Coalition in Geneva underline the centrality and primacy of the United Nations Geneva process. I fully agree with the French Ambassador about the United Nations being the best placed to decide how to take the constitutional committee forward and to ensure that Syrians from the full range of political perspectives and civil society are represented on that committee. It was very welcome to hear what Mr. De Mistura had to say about women's participation in particular. I thank him for referring to the 30-per-cent minimum that we had put in our letter with our Peruvian and Swedish colleagues. When I was posted to the United Nations in Geneva, I in fact met some of those Syrian women. They are very impressive, energetic and, for the most part, secular, and they have

a contribution to make. That is therefore extremely good to hear. I think that the committee represents an important step forward in the political process.

However, as well as addressing fundamental constitutional questions, we also believe that the process needs to make real progress towards creating a calm, safe and neutral environment. That will ultimately be essential if there are ever to be free and fair elections. We believe that we should build on emerging areas of common ground between key international actors. For our part, we, the United Kingdom, remain committed to supporting the political process and a pragmatic political settlement that brings an end to the conflict and that also ensures regional stability. However, we are concerned about the fact that developments such as the recent Law Number 10 casts some doubt on the willingness of the Syrian authorities to engage meaningfully. When he speaks, I would be very grateful to hear an assurance from the Syrian Ambassador about the commitment to the political process.

I said that the political process had made some positive steps forward recently. As the two previous speakers pointed out, that cannot in any way be said of the situation on the ground or of what Mr. De Mistura calls battlefield developments and humanitarian access. We also remain deeply concerned about the escalating attacks by the Syrian forces, backed by Russian air strikes, against the de-escalation zone in south-western Syria. I completely endorse what the United States and French representatives said about not only the risks to life inherent in such action bu. also the significant risk that it poses to regional stability and security. The attacks are in flagrant violation of the de-escalation agreement that was reached between Presidents Trump and Putin in November 2017. It is disappointing for very many reasons, but not least because it casts doubt on the willingness of Russia to abide by its international commitments. I join France and the United States in urging Russia to uphold the commitments under that agreement and to ensure that the Syrian Government abides by the ceasefire so that we can avert a further humanitarian crisis and can make a contribution to regional stability.

Turning to humanitarian access, we also welcome the thorough report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/617). It is clear that the geographical space for cross-border operations has shrunk, particularly to the south-east of Idlib. As areas have transitioned to the control of the Government of Syria, if I have understood correctly, humanitarian access has decreased. Actually, the reverse ought to be true. The fact that the areas have come under the control of the Syrian authorities ought to make humanitarian access easier and more comprehensive. Again, I would therefore be very grateful if the Syrian Ambassador, and perhaps the Russian Ambassador, can address some of that in their remarks, because I would really like to understand why it is so difficult to allow humanitarian access. We talked about that in our last round of consultations. It is still not clear to me why there is an erratic pattern of some United Nations personnel being allowed in but not others and some convoys being allowed through but not others. I therefore really hope that the Security Council can have some more information about that so that we can make some proper decisions about how best we can contribute to the situation on the ground.

In that respect, I would just like to recall that there are still 2 million Syrians living in hard-to-reach locations across the country. "Hard to reach" makes it sound as if one has to forge rivers or climb mountains. It is not that sort of "hard to reach". As far as I understand it, it is an access point. We are therefore back to the point of needing to understand why access is quite so difficult.

I would also like to echo what Mr. Ging said about the attacks on health-care facilities. Those are also unjustifiable. They are outlawed under international law. We call for them to stop. It is not right that aid workers should suffer in that way or that the people of Syria should be denied the opportunity to access medical facilities.

In sum, there are three things that the United Kingdom wishes to call for today. We would like to hear directly from the Syrians and the Russians about their sincerity in engaging in the political process. We would like to hear about the southern de-escalation zone and what can be done to restore the ceasefire and to grant humanitarian access. We would like to hear about the Syrian Government's policies and practices that are creating obstacles for vulnerable displaced people to receive services, food and aid, return home and rebuild their lives.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I will speak on behalf of Kuwait later on in the consultations focusing on the humanitarian situation. However, I wanted to just very briefly address the dramatic escalation that we see, and I wanted to do that publicly and to express our very deep

concern over the military offensive in southwestern Syria and its humanitarian consequences. I would like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura and Mr. John Ging for their briefings today and for giving us the full picture of the effects that that has not only on the humanitarian situation and the population there but also with regard to the political process.

Some 50,000 people have already been displaced. The majority of them are moving towards the Jordanian border. We therefore urge all stakeholders to respect their obligations under international law and international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. I would like to very strongly reiterate the Secretary-General's call for an immediate end to the current military offensive. As we have already stated today, there is a de-escalation agreement in place, which has provided relative calm to south-western Syria over the past year. We call on the guarantors to uphold their commitments to that end.

The recent escalation in south-western Syria contravenes resolution 2401 (2018), which was unanimously adopted by the Council in February. We call on all parties to respect and comply with Security Council resolutions and their international obligations, including to reduce violence, protect civilians and ensure full humanitarian access. The full-scale offensive that we are now seeing is in complete contravention of what we in the Council wish to see and what we had demanded, in particular a de-escalation and full commitment to and engagement in the political process. We must redouble our efforts to achieve a political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and fully endorse, both in word and deed, the efforts of the Secretary-General, Staffan de Mistura and the United Nations-led political process. Let us therefore discuss how we can achieve that solution during our consultations later today and as we move forward.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I would like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura and Mr. John Ging for their briefings and express my deep appreciation for the work of their teams under difficult circumstances.

I will address two topics today in the Chamber: first, the escalating violence in south-western Syria, and secondly, the issue of the need for a political solution.

First, we are deeply concerned about the grave escalation of violence and atrocities in the southern de-escalation zone in Dar'a province. We are also deeply concerned about the massive use of violence by the Syrian regime — supported by its allies — against its own people. In particular, as one of the guarantor Powers, the Russian Federation has a grave responsibility to uphold its commitment to a ceasefire. All relevant parties must do all in their power to prevent another humanitarian disaster. In that regard, we also call on the Russian Federation to exert pressure on the regime in order to create room for a negotiated solution.

The risk of regional spillover is simply too great in such a politically sensitive region, as it is close to Israel, Jordan and the Golan Heights. The hostilities have already caused major displacement from Busra al-Hariri and elsewhere. As Mr. Ging mentioned, more than 45,000 people have had to flee in the direction of the closed border with Jordan and many more might follow if the violence continues to escalate. We fear a repetition of the countless serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law by the regime and its allies, which we have seen throughout the war.

Mr. Ging just quoted statistics from the World Health Organization, which has published shocking numbers on the attacks on medical facilities throughout Syria. Let me repeat those statistics. In 2017, 112 attacks took place, resulting in more than 200 casualties. Already in the first six months of the year, the same number of attacks have taken place, causing more than 250 casualties. In Idlib, south-western Syria, such attacks are ongoing and occur almost daily. Let me be clear, the Syrian regime attacks its own people, medical facilities and first responders. All parties must comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. Attacks against medical facilities and personnel must stop.

All parties should facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of impartial humanitarian relief to all those in need, including first responders, such as the White Helmets, who risk their lives to provide assistance. We would like to echo the words of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry, whose report on the siege and recapture of eastern Ghouta (A/HRC/38/CRP.3) was presented yesterday in the Human Rights Council. That siege and recapture by the regime was marked by war crimes and crimes against humanity. According to that report, the people of eastern Ghouta saw the longest-running siege in modern history. We need accountability. The use of the veto has blocked the Security Council's referral of the situation to the International Criminal Court. We will therefore

continue our work elsewhere, in the Commission of Inquiry and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

Secondly, there is an ever-increasing need for a political solution. The current escalation of violence and the dire humanitarian situation further underscore the urgent need for a sustainable political solution to the conflict. We commend the resilience, efforts [illegible] erance of Staffan de Mistura in that regard. Progress on the development of an inclusive constitutional committee is welcomed and needed. We call for further engagement in Geneva, under the guidance of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We share the concerns of the representative of the United Kingdom on Law Number 10 and its potential implications for the quest for a political solution.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his insightful update and commend his exceptional commitment and determination to pursue peace in Syria. We welcome his multifaceted diplomacy to resolve the crisis.

Kazakhstan welcomes the consultations held on 18 and19 June in Geneva, with the participation of the delegations of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey. Such dialogue is a step in the right direction to implement the Sochi final declaration and to form a Syrian-owned constitutional committee to promote the political process under the auspices of the United Nations and define its composition and working methods, which are important tasks. Independent experts in various areas should also be invited.

I must agree with my colleagues that the United Nations should be the only platform to move forward the political process. At the same time we understand that without the assistance of stakeholders, it is not realistic. That is why we commend the Special Envoy on his attempts to involve various States of the Middle East, the Gulf region and Europe in the process. Similarly, a revamped regional approach is needed to support both the Geneva and Astana processes, uphold the ceasefire and promote the peace process. We would like to assure Mr. Staffan de Mistura and his team of our firm support for their efforts to move forward the political process.

We also thank Mr. John Ging, Director of the Operational Division at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for his comprehensive and informative briefing on the very critical humanitarian situation in Syria. We have carefully studied the most recent reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/619) and on the review of United Nations cross-border operations (S/2018/617). The humanitarian situation is grave and deserves our attention. Kazakhstan highly appreciates the activities of the humanitarian personnel of the United Nations, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Health Organization (WHO), the Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society and other international humanitarian organizations on the ground.

We encourage more cross-border deliveries from Iraq, Jordan and Turkey, in line with all relevant resolutions on the matter. We learned that in May 440 trucks — 19 consignments — delivered life-saving assistance to more than 1 million people through cross-border deliveries. Those operations complement the aid provided by international and Syrian non-governmental organizations that make services from neighbouring countries available to millions more. The work of the Syrian Ministry of Health, in coordination with WHO, and other organizations, under the umbrella of the United Nations, has helped to reach a considerable number of people in need. The Syrian Government must ensure that it improves the level of humanitarian access in several areas that recently came under localized agreements. We also note with satisfaction the fact that there is a reduction in the number of people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, as well as a marked decrease in the besieged locations.

At the same time, special attention must be paid to Idlib, where nearly half of the population has been displaced and must be rescued. We underscore that the freedom of movement of civilians must be ensured by all parties. All evacuation of civilians must be safe and voluntary and abide by internationally recognized protection standards.

Finally, we voice our support for calls by the United Nations on all parties to safeguard civilian lives

and prevent deaths and injuries, as seen in the Dar'a area. We also support calls for allowing freedom of movement and for protecting hospitals, clinics and schools, as required under international humanitarian law and human rights law.

The hostilities must stop. The delivery of assistance from across the Jordanian border, thanks to the outstanding ongoing United Nations-led efforts, should be sustained, as each month it must reach hundreds of thousands of people in need.

Mr. Lie Cheng (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Special Envoy De Mistura and Mr. John Ging for their briefings. We greatly appreciate their efforts in terms of facilitating the political process and alleviating the humanitarian situation in Syria.

The international community has been active recently in advancing the political process in the country. The Special Envoy has engaged with various parties to the Syrian question in intensive in-depth consultations on such issues as the formation of the constitutional committee and the relaunching of the Geneva peace talks. Certain progress has been made. It is hoped that the Astana dialogue will continue to play a role in maintaining the ceasefire in Syria and in advancing the Geneva peace talks.

A political settlement is the only way out. The international community should actively support the United Nations as the main channel for mediation, support the Special Envoy in his efforts to restart the peace talks in Geneva, and push the Syrian Government and the opposition to move towards the same goal. The current priority is to move forward the process of establishing the constitutional committee so as to a solid foundation as early as possible for a comprehensive dialogue on such topics as political governance, elections and counter-terrorism. At the same time, all the relevant regional actors should bear in mind regional peace and stability and create a good environment for the political settlement process.

The sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria should be fully respected. We have taken note of the recent reports of attacks against targets in Syria. We call on the parties concerned to remain calm, act with restraint and avoid taking any actions that may lead to an escalation of the situation.

The Syrian conflict is now in its eighth year. The humanitarian situation remains grave. A large number of civilians have been displaced. China has taken note of the recent report by the Secretary-General on cross-border humanitarian assistance and operations (S/2018/617). We express our grave concern about the suffering of the Syrian people. We will continue to provide assistance to Syria and its neighbours affected by the influx of Syrian refugees, within the limits of our capacities.

We have taken note of the conflicts in parts of Syria. We express our concern and hope that they will not lead to harm to innocent civilians.

Attacks by terrorist organizations in Syria continue to hamper the United Nations humanitarian relief effort. The international community should strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation, harmonize standards and resolutely combat all terrorist organizations listed by the Security Council. We urge the parties involved to work together to exert influence and ensure that resolution 2401 (2018) is effectively implemented. The United Nations and the international community should strengthen communication and coordination with the Syrian Government, provide assistance to all areas in Syria needing it, support mine-clearance operations in affected areas and assist people in returning to their homes.

Mr. Tenya (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the convening of today's meeting and thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura and Mr. John Ging for the important information they have shared with us today.

We would like to stress the significance of the report of the Secretary-General on cross-border assistance in Syria (S/2018/617), which has allowed us to learn more about the functioning of the assistance-distribution system and the verification mechanism. We emphasize the need to preserve a system on which the survival of millions of people depends.

In view of the continuing increase in the number of displaced persons and those in need of assistance, Peru believes it is essential that the Security Council be able to respond to the humanitarian crisis, in keeping with international humanitarian law, regardless of the differences and divisions that the conflict in Syria is generating. We must express our concern about the continuation of hostilities in south-west Syria, particularly in Dar'a province, in the light of the devastating humanitarian consequences it may have for the more than 750,000 civilians who live there, as well as its potential destabilizing impact on the region. We

consider it urgent to address the needs of the thousands of newly displaced people in that area who are being sheltered in makeshift camps near the Jordanian border and remain highly vulnerable. We are also concerned about the 2.5 million people in Idlib, whose situation could lead to further tragedy.

In line with the calls by Secretary-General António Guterres, we consider it necessary for there to be an immediate cessation of hostilities and for all parties to live up to their responsibility to protect the civilian population and allow for the provision of humanitarian assistance in a sustained, safe and unhindered manner throughout Syrian territory. We deeply regret the continued attacks on medical personnel and infrastructure in Syrian territory, particularly in Idlib and more recently in the south-west of the country.

We welcome the valuable efforts in Astana of the working group on detainees and missing persons. We are confident that positive results will soon be achieved there.

With respect to the political process, we commend the efforts of Mr. De Mistura and lend our support to the establishment of a framework of minimum understanding, which has allowed for progress to be made in setting up the constitutional committee, which was considered at his recent meeting in Geneva with representatives of the Astana guarantor countries and other relevant actors. We believe it is important that the Syrian opposition submit a consensual list of candidates for membership of the committee as soon as possible. We emphasize the need to ensure adequate representativeness in the committee and the importance of ensuring a 30 per cent level of participation by women, pursuant to the letter that Peru, as a Chair of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, together with Sweden and the United Kingdom, addressed to the Secretary-General and others yesterday.

The setting up and launching of the committee are undoubtedly complex tasks that require concessions from all parties. We have great confidence in the diplomatic skills and tireless efforts of the Special Envoy, to whom Peru offers its full support.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): As always, it is with great pleasure and satisfaction that we receive the briefing by Mr. Staffan de Mistura. We wish to express our gratitude for his efforts aimed at achieving a political and diplomatic solution to the crisis in Syria. As the political situation is closely linked to the humanitarian crisis prevailing in the country, we also want to commend the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, under the leadership of Mr. John Ging, for the enormous task it has undertaken.

With regard to the recent developments in the political process, my delegation would like to make the following clarifications.

First, we note with great concern the escalation of fighting in south-west Syria, especially in Dar'a province, which, as the violence increases, is leading to the displacement of hundreds of people and numerous civilian victims.

It should be remembered that the south-west region of Syria is an important strategic territory owing to its proximity to the Jordanian border and the Golan Heights, which is why it is necessary to guarantee and respect the zone of détente agreed by the parties in 2017 with a view to reducing violence. In that regard, in line with the Secretary-General's press release of 22 June (SG/SM/19099), we call for an immediate cessation of hostilities in that part of the Syrian territory and urge the parties concerned to respect their obligations under international law and international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure.

In order to put an end to these military offensives, it is essential that we pool our efforts and create synergies so as to move forward and give priority to the political process being facilitated by the United Nations. In parallel with the Geneva peace talks and the Astana challenges, the Sochi guarantors must continue to work towards the establishment of a functioning representative constitutional committee that brings together members of the Government and opposition groups, with the participation of civil society, in particular women's organizations.

We very much welcome the meetings hosted by Mr. Staffan de Mistura on 17, 19 and 25 June with the Sochi guarantors and the so-called Small Group, intended to chart a course to allow for the implementation of the Sochi final declaration and the establishment of the intra-Syrian constitutional committee, facilitated by the United Nations within the framework of the Geneva process and in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

There is no time for a rhetoric of double standards or for ambiguous or fruitless negotiations. It is time for a frank dialogue between the parties and actors involved, giving priority to constructive exchanges and substantive debates, with a view to finding common ground.

My Government continues to deplore the worsening humanitarian crisis, as described in the report of the Secretary-General dated 20 June (S/2018/619). It is vital that the parties refrain from hindering humanitarian access by the United Nations actors, which is key to assessing the needs on the ground ensure the delivery of assistance to and the protection of civilians.

We continue to call upon the parties and those who have influence over them to allow for safe, sustained and unhindered humanitarian access to those in need, in line with their obligations under international humanitarian law.

To conclude, with respect to cross-border operations carried out by the United Nations, my Government is of the view that the provision of humanitarian assistance on a cross-border basis is essential and must be maintained. We support the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report on the review of United Nations cross-border humanitarian assistance (S/2018/617). We are convinced that the observations of the Secretary-General can help United Nations humanitarian entities and their partner agencies further strengthen cross-border operations, as underscored in the report. Close cooperation among the various humanitarian actors is essential in order to ensure that people in need receive such vital assistance.

Mr. Dah (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would like to express its gratitude to Mr. Staffan de Mistura and Mr. John Ging for their respective briefings on the political and humanitarian aspects of the crisis in Syria.

Echoing other delegations that spoke earlier, my delegation remains deeply concerned by the most recent developments in Syria, which are characterized as a fresh resurgence of fighting in the south-west part of the country, particularly in Dar'a, which has triggered the flight of some 45,000 people towards the Jordanian border. We particularly deplore the challenging of the de-escalation status enjoyed by the city of Dar'a, which had allowed that city to benefit from relative calm. It is now seeing an intensification of armed clashes and bombings carried out by the various parties to the conflict.

My country further deplores the fact that it remains impossible for the United Nations and humanitarian agencies to gain access to areas previously under siege owing to the number of administrative obstacles and red tape. Côte d'Ivoire wishes once again to call for the protection of civilians and for respect for international humanitarian law so as to ensure safe, sustained and unhindered access of humanitarian assistance, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular resolutions 2165 (2014), which established the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the cross-border delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria, and 2401 (2018), which called for an immediate cessation of the fighting and the establishment of a lasting humanitarian pause in Syria.

My country welcomes the independent review of United Nations humanitarian cross-border operations, as called for by resolution 2393 (2017), whose recommendations will allow us to further strengthen the Monitoring Mechanism by taking account of the views of the parties concerned, in particular the Syrian authorities, neighbouring countries and United Nations humanitarian agencies.

As the military escalation on the ground continues unabated, my delegation reiterates the importance of a political solution aimed at restoring stability and finding a lasting solution to the humanitarian crisis in Syria. Côte d'Ivoire remains convinced that the military solution cannot be a solution to the Syrian conflict and calls once again on the parties involved to implement a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire and resume political negotiations for a lasting peace under the auspices of the United Nations.

In that context, my country welcomes the various initiatives aimed at relaunching the intra-Syrian dialogue process and encourages the Special Envoy, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, to undertake, within the framework of the Geneva process, all steps necessary to establish a constitutional committee for Syria, as agreed at the Sochi conference.

My delegation welcomes also the consultations that took place on the establishment of such a constitutional committee on 18 and 19 June in Geneva, led by the Special Envoy and bringing together representatives of the Astana guarantor States on the Syrian negotiations. It welcomes the holding on 25 June in Geneva of a

meeting between the Special Envoy of the United Nations for Syria and the representatives of the Small Group of the Global coalition, composed of France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, where views were exchanged on constitutional progress and ongoing diplomatic efforts, in order to create synergy between international players.

My delegation also welcomes the efforts to harmonize the positions of the members of the Small Group and the Astana group within the framework of the establishment of the constitutional committee, which is charged with drafting a new constitution for Syria, and welcomes also the decision of the Syrian Government to transmit a list of 50 persons to be considered for membership in the committee.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire continues to call on the Syrian parties to choose the path of dialogue and to move the political process forward in order to find a lasting end to the crisis, in line with the road map enshrined in resolution 2254 (2015). It calls on the international community to support the mediation and good-offices efforts of the Secretary-General and of his Special Envoy, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, which are aimed at bringing the Syrian parties back to the negotiating table in the framework of a constructive dialogue with a view to finding a lasting solution to the crisis in Syria.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to thank both briefers, Mr. Staffan de Mistura and Mr. John Ging, for their comprehensive briefings. I should like in particular to thank Staffan for having shared with us what he calls cautious optimism and by bringing hope to our deliberations. He has our full support.

Allow me to focus on two points: the political process and the humanitarian situation in Syria.

On the political track, let me once again reiterate our strong support for the relaunching of a United Nations-facilitated political process through the establishment of a constitutional committee. During the conference hosted in Sochi by Russia along with Iran and Turkey, it was agreed that the United Nations would provide assistance with forming a constitutional committee, including help with defining its mandate, terms of reference, powers, rules of procedure and the selection criteria for its composition.

We support an inclusive, Syrian-led and Syrian-owned constitutional committee under United Nations auspices in Geneva. It should be implemented now as a priority, and further steps should swiftly follow so as to enable a negotiated political transition process. It requires the full and constructive engagement of all the parties to the conflict, especially the Syrian authorities, to participate in the negotiations in good faith and without preconditions. We welcome the participation of women in this process as important actors for peace and mediation.

Unfortunately, military logic continues to drive developments in Syria. We still face continuous and widespread violence and violations of international law, including abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law. The most striking example of this are the recent events in the south-west de-escalation zone, where the Government started a military offensive earlier this month. Taking into consideration the recent events in that zone, we strongly condemn the intensification of military operations and call for an immediate end to the violence in the south-west.

The humanitarian situation in Syria remains critical. Safe and sustainable humanitarian access must be guaranteed, as called for in resolution 2401 (2018). Fortunately, after taking control of eastern Ghouta and Yarmouk, the Government has continued to provide regular access to United Nations humanitarian actors, which is necessary in order for needs to be assessed and for assistance and protection to be scaled up.

The difficult humanitarian situation in the south-west of Syria is exacerbated by the military escalation there. Military operations by the Government's forces with the support of Russia have already displaced thousands of civilians in the south-west de-escalation zone, the majority of whom are moving towards the Jordanian borders. In that context, it should be emphasized that there are already more than 2 million people in need in areas accessed through cross-border operations. Deliveries to those areas remain critical and should be ensured by all parties, first and foremost by the Syrian Government.

Humanitarian imperatives should be our primary priority. We call upon all stakeholders who have influence on the parties to the conflict to ensure the implementation of the cessation of hostilities. In that regard, let me emphasize the importance of protecting vulnerable groups, especially children, women and the religious minorities, who are far too often affected by the conflict in Syria.

The recent offensive in the region of Dar'a, in south-west Syria, is also very worrisome. It is taking place in the de-escalation zone that the Astana guarantors committed to safeguard. Necessary measures to protect civilians, as well as safe and sustainable humanitarian access, need to be ensured.

I would also very briefly like to express our concern about the so-called Law Number 10. We underline the need for the Security Council to remain seized of that matter.

In conclusion, let me stress the need for maintaining the unity of the Council on the question of the full implementation across Syria of the Council's humanitarian resolution 2401 (2018). Unfortunately, we are seeing the continuation of a new military offensive. That worries us, as we may again face an increase in violence. The adoption of resolution 2401 (2018) was just the beginning of the process. We call on all stakeholders with influence on the ground to the take the steps necessary to ensure that the fighting stops, the Syrian people are protected and, finally, humanitarian assistance is delivered.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the briefings provided by Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. John Ging, Director of the Coordination and Response Division of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). We reiterate our full support for the work they are doing.

We must once again express our regret that this conflict has been going on for eight years, and that we continue to witness the constant siege and violence suffered by the Syrian people, especially the most vulnerable populations, women and children. According to OCHA, more than 13 million people require humanitarian assistance, more than 1.5 million people still live in hard-to-reach areas and more than 8,000 live in besieged areas. Also, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are more than 6.6 million internally displaced persons in Syria. We regret that in May alone more than 130,000 civilians were displaced from the city of Afrin as a result of the ongoing violence resulting from military operations.

We also express our concern in the light of the escalating violence we are seeing in the south-west of Syria. We call for a cessation of violence, which would allow for the restoration of the previous relative calm that was seen in the region. By the same token, we condemn any attack on hospitals or educational facilities, and we call on the parties to uphold their obligations under international law and international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. We underscore the tireless work being carried out by various humanitarian agencies and their staff, who risk their own lives to continue to strive to deliver much-needed humanitarian access.

My delegation calls for the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). In that regard, we must highlight the various initiatives that have led to local evacuation agreements that have facilitated not only the entry of humanitarian assistance but also the evacuation of persons in need, including members of armed groups and their families. We hope that those agreements will continue. Furthermore, in the framework of the various Security Council resolutions, we encourage the continued deployment of convoys, including cross-border convoys.

We believe it is important to point out that more than 2,000 requests were approved in the month of May for food distribution by the World Food Programme, as well as for first aid and vaccinations for more than 1 million children and mothers. According to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/539), that means that approximately 2 million people received food assistance and more than 1 million benefited from water, food, sanitation and hygiene services. We therefore call on the Syrian Government to continue to cooperate in that area and to coordinate more closely and actively with United Nations agencies and their representatives.

We also draw the Council's attention to the ongoing return of civilians to the city of Raqqa — the report of the Secretary-General indicates that more than 130,000 civilians returned to that city in May alone. We reiterate that, in addition to having to face a lack of basic services, those who are returning must also grapple with the dangers of explosive remnants of war. Clearing Raqqa and other affected areas in Syria of such remnants is therefore essential and must be urgently carried out in order to avoid more deaths and allow people to resume their daily lives. Similarly, we reiterate our concern about the need to safeguard the lives of the thousands of innocent civilians, including children, who continue to move back to the city of Idlib. It is essential to prevent a further escalation of violence in that area.

Against that backdrop, it is important to reinforce the Astana agreements, which established key de-escalation zones, which are among the international initiatives that have helped to reduce violence in Syria. We believe that our common approach to this conflict must focus on adopting measures to reduce violence on the ground, build confidence among the parties involved, alleviate the humanitarian situation and promote efforts to find a peaceful political solution to the conflict. For that reason, the political process must be relaunched on the basis of the various initiatives and meetings that have taken place at different levels bringing together the different parties involved in the conflict.

In that regard, we note the information provided by Mr. De Mistura that he is seeing headway in the establishment of the constitutional committee. Therefore, we once again highlight the commitments made at the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, held in Sochi, which focused on strengthening the political process lead by the United Nations in the framework of the road map set out by resolution 2254 (2015). Those efforts are to be developed through the drafting of a new constitution and the establishment of the constitutional committee, which in our view should be representative and neutral. We hope that the work of the committee will be active and dynamic and will include the participation of all necessary stakeholders in the conflict.

We express our full support for the work being carried out by the Special Envoy to bring together the parties involved within the framework of a dialogue that will enable them to achieve sustained peace in the medium- and long-term. Similarly, we commend the good offices of the Secretary-General aimed at working closely with the members of the Security Council in finding a peaceful settlement to the conflict.

Lastly, we reject any attempt to foster factiousness, ethnic divisions or sectarianism in Syria. The Syrian people must freely decide their future and their political leadership within the framework of their sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity and without any pressure or foreign interference. We reiterate that the only option for resolving the conflict is through an inclusive, consultative and concerted political process led by and for the Syrian people.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we thank and commend Mr. Staffan de Mistura and Mr. John Ging for their comprehensive and detailed briefings. We reiterate our appreciation for all United Nations efforts in every facet of the crisis in Syria.

Ambassador Olof Skoog will speak on behalf of Kuwait and Sweden during the informal consultations later, as the two countries were the co-penholders on the resolution on the humanitarian situation in Syria. Nevertheless, I would like to make the following main points.

First, we welcome the reasons that Mr. De Mistura just gave to us as to why we should remain cautiously optimistic about progress made concerning the establishment of the constitutional committee. If carried out, that step will be critical to the transitional political process. In that regard, we stress that there is no military or humanitarian solution to the crisis in Syria. The only way to resolve the crisis is through a political solution, which will require all of us to accelerate ending the crisis through such a solution to a prolonged crisis that does not have repercussions only for the Middle East but far beyond the region. In that connection, I underscore what my colleague Mr. Skoog said, namely, that we believe in the importance of committing to resolution 2401 (2018), which needs to be implemented. As members we shoulder an important responsibility to follow up on that consensus resolution and ensure its implementation. The guarantors of the Astana agreement also must follow up on its implementation.

We agree with the assessment of the Secretary-General in his report (S/2018/617) on cross-border operations and humanitarian aid. Providing such assistance is in line with resolution 2393 (2017) and other previous relevant resolutions, and is part of the humanitarian response in Syria. As was just said by Mr. Ging, reliance on such assistance for people in certain provinces is on the rise. We therefore have to maintain and find ways to improve it so as to reach remote and hard-to-reach areas.

Secondly, we share the Secretary-General's concern about the recent military escalation in south-west Syria, to which Mr. De Mistura referred, and its potential humanitarian repercussions. We have already seen some of its negative consequences in the number of displaced persons, which, to date, has reached almost 50,000. Concerning the statistics relating to health-care facilities cited by Mr. Ging in his briefing, we are deeply concerned about and condemn the targeting of such facilities, which is a clear violation of the relevant

Security Council resolutions and most certainly constitutes war crimes. We urge all parties to respect the provisions of international law and international humanitarian law, especially the de-escalation zone and ceasefire agreement in south-western Syria, which had been calm over the past year.

Before concluding, it seems wise to remind all of us that we are only a few days away from the sixth anniversary of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) of 2012, which serves as the cornerstone for reaching a solution to the Syrian crisis. It was endorsed by the Security Council via resolution 2254 (2015) and enjoys the support of the League of Arab States.

The people of Syria, with their rich culture and history, are no longer able to bear further humanitarian suffering. It is incumbent upon us to support the political track agreed by all segments of society of the brotherly Syrian people, which would maintain the territorial integrity, unity, independence and sovereignty of Syria and meet their legitimate aspirations.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I wish to thank both Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and Director Ging for their comprehensive briefings.

We all agree that only a comprehensive intra-Syrian dialogue facilitated by the United Nations, pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015), can end the Syrian crisis. In that regard, we reiterate our support for the continued endeavours of the Special Envoy to meaningfully relaunch the Geneva process, with particular emphasis on the formation of a constitutional committee based on the final statement of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi. We commend the Special Envoy for conducting a series of consultations with all States and parties concerned. He has indeed been indefatigable in carrying out his work, and we are encouraged that there has been some positive movement with regard to the establishment of the constitutional committee. We took note of the very significant series of meetings he held on 19, 22 and 25 June. In that connection, we welcome the fact that the Syrian Government has submitted to the Special Envoy a list of 50 names to be included among the members of the committee. We acknowledge that the Special Envoy has continued consultations so that the opposition can also submit its list. That is very critical because it is imperative to ensure that the committee be fully inclusive and representative of the Syrian people. As the Special Envoy said, it is also indispensable that the constitutional committee be credible and enjoy international legitimacy.

The post-conflict need for support for reconstruction makes the issue of legitimacy critical. As the Special Envoy also stressed, it is important that it be Syrian-owned, which was also underscored in resolution 2254 (2015). That is also undeniably a principle enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

While the Special Envoy has been working tirelessly to create common ground with regard to the political track, there have been serious and worrying developments on the ground. As the Secretary-General conveyed in press statements issued on the 10 and 22 June (SG/SM/19080 and SG/SM/19099, respectively) military escalations in south-west Syria and Idlib are a source of deep concern. As both involve the de-escalation zones, we call on all parties to respect the ceasefire arrangements and exercise restraint. We encourage all guarantors to work together and end current military escalations, which cause suffering and displacement among civilians and pose a threat to regional security. As the Secretary-General stated in his report of 20 June,

> "[t]he creation of a calm, safe and neutral environment across the Syrian Arab Republic that will enable all Syrians to express confidence in a political process is paramount." (*S/2018/619, para. 45*)

In order to protect civilians and civilian facilities, as well as to create a supportive environment for the political process, we stress that de-escalation must be a top priority. De-escalation is obviously also needed to ensure the quality of humanitarian access for the United Nations and its humanitarian partners. In that regard, while the drop in the number of people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas is a positive development, we remain concerned about the lack of safe, sustained and sufficient humanitarian access to all Syrians, based on the assessment of their humanitarian needs. According to the latest Secretary-General report, this year has seen

> "a collapse in the ability of the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to reach people across conflict lines from within the Syrian Arab Republic." (*ibid., para. 42*)

That is why we believe that as long as the humanitarian needs remain staggering, all parties should facilitate safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access so that

aid can reach those in the greatest need. In addition, all pledges should be disbursed in order to sustain the humanitarian programmes. We have taken note of what Mr. Ging had to say about that, as it is definitely a source of concern for us as well.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report on the review of the United Nations cross-border operations (S/2018/617), based on resolution 2393 (2017), which notes that cross-border aid delivery remains critical to ensuring that humanitarian assistance reaches those in need through the most direct route. While we acknowledge that fact, we encourage the United Nations and its partners to implement the recommendations in the report, particularly those that could further strengthen coordination, transparency and effectiveness, so that aid goes only to those who really need it.

Finally, we reiterate our firm position that there can be no military solution to the protracted Syrian conflict, and that all Syrian actors should meaningfully engage with the Special Envoy as he continues his diplomatic work to relaunch the Geneva intra-Syrian talks. The Council should also support the Special Envoy's efforts at this critical juncture.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Russian Federation.

We thank Mr. De Mistura and Mr. Ging for their briefings.

Throughout most of Syria, which is under the control of its legitimate Government, civilian life continues to be restored, including with Russia's active assistance. The Syrian authorities are giving major attention to the liberated areas around Damascus and in northern Homs province, where residents are returning. The streets in eastern Ghouta are being cleared of rubble and residential buildings are being rebuilt. Funds have been allocated for repairing medical facilities in Nashabiyah, Harasta, Douma and Maliha. In Rastan and Talbiseh work has been completed on high-voltage electricity transmission lines and transformer sub-stations. It has been announced that rail freight links have been restored between Tartus and Homs provinces.

Nothing like that is happening in the areas of Syria that have been occupied, in violation of its sovereignty, by the so-called coalition, which is making up excuses to remain on Syrian soil a little longer. Months have elapsed since Raqqa was liberated from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, but nothing has changed for the better. The so-called liberators, after reducing the city to rubble — medical facilities, bakeries, everything — are doing nothing to improve things and today have been trying to lecture us about morality. A difficult situation has developed in the Rukban camp, which is near the coalition's Al-Tanf military base, an area closed to outsiders, and no progress is contemplated with humanitarian deliveries. On top of that, there are reports of a corrupt scheme there whereby armed groups are charging people who want to leave the camp a steep fee of as much as $500 per family.

It appears that there are delays in getting international assistance to Syria with mine clearance, including through the United Nations Mine Action Service. Meanwhile, a unit from the Russian Armed Forces' International Mine Action Centre has conducted four operations in record time that are unique in both scale and complexity, two in Palmyra's historic architectural complex and in the residential part of the city, and two in Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor, enabling tens of thousands of Syrians to return to their homes. Many priceless world heritage objects have been rescued. I will not read out the statistics about the quantity of explosive ordnance that our sappers have defused, but they are significant.

There is no justification for the hysterics about the so-called Law Number 10, whose aim, contrary to what some have tried to suggest, is not to expropriate property but to protect property rights violated during the war. The Syrians are not avoiding contact with United Nations experts on the issue but are clarifying details and heeding advice.

The pressing issue is restoring areas damaged in the hostilities, and that requires major help from the entire international community with the active participation of the United Nations. Helping Syria rebuild cannot be conditional on any political demands. One way to get started would be to start restoring Syria's health-care sector and local pharmaceutical industry by guaranteeing the possibility of buying medicines and medical equipment from abroad.

The quality of the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/617) on the review of cross-border humanitarian operations is disappointing. There is a gross error on the very first page, where it claims that cross-border humanitarian operations are provided for the areas

not controlled by the Syrian Government. Where did that come from? Resolution 2165 (2014), which established the mechanism, indicates that cross-border humanitarian deliveries are to be delivered to residents throughout the country in need of help.

In abstaining in the voting on resolution 2393 (2017), we sent the clear message that we think it is essential to work to end the mechanism. In a constructive approach, we decided to give the United Nations and the other interested parties time to prepare for the closure of cross-border operations and to lay the ground for a dialogue with the authorities in Damascus about new ways to deliver aid to the entire Syrian population. However, the United Nations has not made use of that opportunity. The report fails to take into account the military and political aspects of the situation on the ground and does not address the core principles of providing humanitarian assistance, including respect for State sovereignty. It is strange that the authors of the report found not a single flaw in the cross-border operations. And yet they exist, as we well know. I would once again like to urge the Secretariat to come up with ways to provide a gradual and agreed-on withdrawal from cross-border operations in the near future.

In the past few days a great deal has been said about escalating tensions in south-western Syria. Incidentally, I want to note that we, like others, are not indifferent to Jordan and Israel's security issues. We should point out that Jabhat Al-Nusra fighters frequently organize attacks on Syrian military personnel and obstruct the achievement of local ceasefires with armed groups that want to lay down their weapons and return to normal life. As we know, the authorities are offering those opportunities within the framework of Government amnesty. The cities of Dar'a and Suwayda, as well as villages that have opted for reconciliation, have been under fire from jihadists' rocket and artillery shelling.

There are other sources of instability. The situation around Fu'ah and Kafraya, which according to United Nations classification is the only blocked area in Syria, remains very tense, and terrorists have intensified their shelling of residential areas of Aleppo. Rather than using their influence to help achieve reconciliation, some outside stakeholders, on the contrary, are encouraging their clients to take offensive action, which can hardly be seen as evidence of being disposed to cooperate on de-escalation. We should point out that none of the agreements on a cessation of hostilities provides for pauses in the fight against terrorists. In Syria the elimination of remnants of terrorist groups continues. On the night of 17 and 18 June, massive air strikes were launched simultaneously on positions of the Syrian army and its allies near the village of Al-Hari, to the south-east of the town of Abu Kamal in Deir ez-Zor province. Dozens of people at the forefront of the fight against terrorism were killed as a result. This is not the first incident of this kind. What good does it do? Who wants to give extremists a chance to to hold their heads high and try to recover their lost positions?

I want Mr. De Mistura to know that Russia is working for definitive progress towards a political settlement on an agreed international basis under the auspices of the United Nations. Mr. De Mistura recently took part in the high-level consultations with representatives of the Astana process guarantor countries, so he is well aware of our firm commitment to an intra-Syrian dialogue. We have been working consistently with the Syrian parties to encourage them to implement joint efforts. At this stage, that is primarily about implementing the recommendations on establishing a constitutional committee that were formulated at the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi. The Syrian Government has submitted its list of delegates. As we understand it, the opposition camp, whose unity is still doubtful, is in the process of considering this. Ultimately, of course, it is the Syrians themselves who will have to agree on all the necessary details, with the assistance of the United Nations.

In a broader context, the first order of business is to restore normality to the relations between Syria and other States in the region that have been undermined during the conflict, which would significantly improve the situation in the Middle East.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have listened to many opinions and political and humanitarian assessments today in the Council's review of the situation in my country, Syria, on the issuance of the fifty-second report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/619). I have also heard two briefings, from the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria and the Director of the Coordination and Response Division of the Office for the Coordination

of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). I noticed a political maturity and sense of responsibility and objectivity in some delegations' statements, while others have presented a false view by reading the situation in Syria in a mistaken and distorted way. I will not go into detail by responding to all the points that have been made, but I will touch on some of the most important things I have heard.

First, at the beginning of Special Envoy de Mistura's briefing, he described three priorities — de-escalation, reviving the political process and bridging the gaps between the various stakeholders through high-level diplomacy. Of course we have no objection to this. However, we do have some pertinent comments that the Special Envoy and the Council should hear. After seven years of a terrible terrorist war imposed on my country, and four years of cooperation with the Special Envoy, he has failed to include combating terrorism in his list of priorities, despite the fact that we are all aware that Da'esh is still present in Syria under American protection, as is the Al-Nusra Front, under the protection of the Americans, the Israelis and others. There are also many terrorist armed factions that have refused to accede to Astana 4, a meeting that was attended by the Special Envoy, who was there in Astana, and which created the concept of de-escalation zones. The reason I bring this up is because one of the provisions of the Astana 4 agreement includes an exception for armed groups that refuse to accede to the agreement. This is not just about Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front, but about any group that refuses to join the agreement.

Over the past seven years, we have moved from fighting terrorist proxies to directly combating the original terrorists themselves. The terrorism situation is clear now. Two days ago, armed terrorist groups out of Al-Tanf and the Rukban camp attacked the cities of Suwayda and Dar'a, as well as other areas where the Syrian army is stationed. This has been referred to as southern Syria. Terrorists came from Al-Tanf and the Rukban camp, which are areas under the control of United States forces, as we all know. Is it not the Syrian army's duty to respond to an attack by terrorists on two southern towns in order to protect hundreds of thousands of civilians? I raise this question since it relates to the priority of combating terrorism, which the Special Envoy failed to include. I bring it up because we have agreed that the Geneva agenda has four defined baskets, one of which is combating terrorism. We should remind ourselves that the priority of combating terrorism is on the agenda in Geneva.

Secondly, the Special Envoy made one statement this morning that is dangerous and extremely worrying both for us and some others. He said,

> "I want to believe that the Security Council will not allow this [situation in the south-west of Syria] to become another eastern Ghouta or ... Aleppo".

Does that fall within the mandate of the Special Envoy? Is he mandated to tell the Syrian Government and military how to combat terrorism on the Syrian territories? This is not about combating terrorism on the territories of the United States, France, Britain, Sweden, Poland or Holland. We are talking only about combating terrorism on our territory. That is part of our sovereignty, which the Security Council has underscored in more than 27 resolutions adopted by it. All those resolutions start with the words: the Council reaffirms the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. If the Council reaffirms our sovereignty, how can it consider, as was mentioned by one colleague, the Ambassador of Sweden, that what is happening in southern Syria is military aggression? When the Syrian army itself combats terrorism in the south of the country, can we call that an aggression?

My colleague the Permanent Representative of France said that we must protect the White Helmets in the Golan. It is strange to hear such as statement from a Permanent Representative in the Security Council. The White Helmets are a terrorist group affiliated with the Al-Qaida and the Al-Nusra Front. It is spread over the Golan and other parts and is supported by Israel. It is part of the problem that we always talk about. The Permanent Representative of France says that we must protect the White Helmets in the Golan. Does the mandate of the Security Council provide for the protection of the White Helmets or of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), which is under the Security Council, located along the separation line in the Golan? What is the priority of the Council, to provide protection for the White Helmets or the UNDOF force? As the members of the Council know, some elements from the Fiji and Philippines units were abducted by the White Helmets and the Al-Nusra Front few years ago, as a result of which many UNDOF posts were abandoned three years ago.

The Permanent Representative of France also briefly made a comment — but I think that it caught

the Council's attention — calling for a Syrian Dayton Agreement. I hope that I was mistaken when I heard that. He said that we could perhaps reach a Syrian Dayton. Fortunately, we started today's meetings by talking about Serbia (see S/PV.8295) and the situation of Mr. Mladić and others at the International Criminal Court. Less than 25 years since the Dayton Agreement on implementing the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina was signed, in 1995, the Security Council is still looking into minute details of importance related to the consequences of a Dayton Agreement. Does the Ambassador of France mean that the internationalization of the situation in Syria by some must come about, just like the Dayton Agreement? Of course, my Government fully rejects that statement.

Mr. Ging talked in detail about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Tell Rifaat and Afrin area. He is right. However, he did not mention the reason behind the deterioration of the humanitarian situation there, as if the Turkish monster did not exist and he had never come across the Turkish occupation and Turkey's military invasion to Afrin and Tell Rifaat. Worse than that, Mr. Ging praised the role of Turkey for its support and provision of humanitarian assistance to those two cities. Is not that shameful? Instead of accusing the Turkish side of invading part of Syrian territory, leading to the humanitarian tragedy in the north, we hear the representative of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs praising the Turks for having delivered humanitarian assistance to the part of Syria that was invaded by them.

Today we are considering the fifty-second report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2139 (2014). The United States of America, the United Kingdom and France, as well as some influential parties in the Secretariat, have worked hard to promote the resolution since the issuance of the first report on its implementation, in order to harness it to become a political tool and bring pressure to bear on the Government of Syria to implement the agendas of those States. Those agendas consist of interfering in the internal affairs of Syria and destabilizing its security and stability. Instead, the objective of the resolution should have been to assist Syrians to overcome their suffering due to the unprecedented terrorist war imposed upon them.

Apart from the propaganda that some strive to promote, claiming that the Syrian Government is hindering access to humanitarian assistance, the facts show once again that my Government cooperates with the United Nations and other international organizations in Syria to deliver humanitarian assistance to those who need it. That was demonstrated by paragraph 25 of the report under consideration. That paragraph states that last May the Government of Syria approved all requests submitted by the World Food Programme — and I repeat all requests, that is, 2,180 such requests. The Government has also approved all requests submitted by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). I do not know why the World Food Programme and UNHCR are content to cooperate with the Government of Syria, while OCHA is not. That is strange.

What is deplorable is the fact that the drafters of all 52 reports have turned a blind eye to the details of the crimes of occupation, aggression and invasion against Syria and its people — crimes represented by support for terrorism and the imposition of unilateral and coercive economic measures against the people of Syria, which the United Nations time and again annually stresses that they are unlawful and violate international law, the Charter of the United Nations and human rights principles. However, we heard biased testimony about medicines in Syria, as if those who spoke did not know that the Turks have in fact dismantled more than 1,441 facilities and factories in Aleppo. They have moved their components to Turkey and sold them as scrap metal. Most of the laboratories that were dismantled in Syria were in fact used to manufacture medicines. In addition, there are the sanctions, which exacerbate the situation. However, that is not recognized by the Secretary-General or by OCHA or anybody else.

It is truly deplorable that the drafters of the report have ignored the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the United States of America and its allies in Raqqa. That was mentioned by the President of the Security Council. Those crimes happened in other Syrian cities under the pretext of combating terrorism, ignoring the role of the Governments that sponsor and finance terrorism, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, which strive to incite violence and terrorism and spread radical ideologies and hatred while supporting distorted religious ideas. The lack of professionalism and credibility is truly deplorable. They have reached unacceptable levels. That was demonstrated by those who wrote the report who have doubted the findings of the United Nations assessment mission in Raqqa. They made only selective and general references to the report

of that mission. They presented it in a distorted way, ignoring the tragic situation in Raqqa and the suffering of its people due to the grave crimes committed by the international coalition and its affiliated militias.

There are hundreds of thousands of mines in Raqqa. Every month between 50 and 70 returnees die as a result of mine explosions, an issue that some representatives here at this international Organization have refused to address until now. We spent more than six months trying to reach an agreement with the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) to demine Raqqa. Six months have now passed. The operation was recently halted for two months because UNMAS management insisted on bringing in a French person who is located in Gaziantep. That is how the United Nations programme perceived the situation — without that French person we could not demine hundreds of thousands of mines in Raqqa. Six months have passed and neither the Mine Action Service nor the Secretariat has visited Raqqa to demine it.

It is deplorable that the authors of the report turned a blind eye, for the fifty-second time, to the details of the crimes committed by Israel and its repeated aggression against the territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, including its continued support to terrorist armed groups in the separation zone, first and foremost Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front. We must condemn the entire situation because of its repercussions on the humanitarian situation in Syria. However, that did not attract the attention of the authors of the report, despite their professionalism in drafting 52 reports so far. My Government has submitted an official letter setting its response to the report under consideration. I would like to briefly highlight three points.

First, the authors of the report must be held accountable for their violations of the provisions of resolutions on combating terrorism. They referred to Jabhat Al-Nusra, Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham and other affiliated groups as armed opposition in Idlib. Such groups have been designated as terrorist entities on the Security Council's list of terrorist organizations.

Secondly, the clear politicization by the authors of the report is no longer acceptable. They make the Syrian Government fully responsible for violations of humanitarian law. They turn a blind eye to the real hurdles to the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need, in particular the lax conduct of OCHA officials stationed in Damascus, who do not shoulder their responsibilities or carry out their duties. They refuse to visit areas that have been liberated or those where reconciliation has occurred. They are extremely selective in conducting their work and providing assistance, which is supposed to be humanitarian and non-discriminatory. There is also the lack of funding, and some donors link their funds to political preconditions that run counter to the principles of humanitarian work.

Thirdly, since they disregarded the fact that Turkish aggression on Afrin is the primary reason for the displacement and suffering of civilians, what is the objective of the authors of the report?

The supporters and sponsors in the Council of the terrorist group Jabhat Al-Nusra have used today's meeting to spread unfounded and false accusations against the Government of my country every time the Syrian Arab Army makes progress against that terrorist organization in an attempt to boost the morale of the elements in that criminal organization.

In conclusion, my Government reiterates that it will continue to be relentless in its fight against terrorism in the Syrian Arab Republic. We stress our principled position that the solution to the Syrian crisis is a political one, based on intra-Syrian dialogue led by the Syrians, without foreign interference or preconditions.

The President: The representative of Sweden has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I appreciate the fact that all Council members have spoken. Together with some colleagues, including Kuwait, I had indicated that we would like to discuss the political process and have a conversation with Mr. De Mistura on the way forward. However, I understand and respect the President's decision that that will not be possible today. But I hope that we can do so very soon.

Having just heard the intervention by the representative of Syria, I would like to say a few words. I will not go through the several inaccuracies in his statement, including a reference to a remark I made. I would like to say — and I do so on behalf of Kuwait as well — that we should all support the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the work it conducts on everyone's behalf.

The following is a joint Sweden-Kuwait. I would like to make three points on the humanitarian situation.

First, as the Secretary-General stated in his report, we are deeply concerned about the fact that 2018 has seen

> "a collapse in the ability of the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to reach people across conflict lines from within the Syrian Arab Republic." (*S/2018/619, para. 42*)

Only a fraction of people in need are being reached, and there is negative trajectory with regard to humanitarian access in Syria. In their dialogue with Damascus, we encourage those with influence — and this is an opportunity to say this directly to the Syrian representative — to step up to the signing of facilitation letters for convoys, United Nations regular programming to areas recently retaken by Government forces and the approval of visas for United Nations personnel, including OCHA staff.

Secondly, we condemn the continued attacks against medical facilities, of which there has been an increase in 2018. We deplore the continued removal and rejection of medical items from humanitarian convoys. Such acts may constitute war crimes.

Thirdly, we welcome the report of the Secretary-General on the review of United Nations cross-border operations (S/2018/617). As cross-line access is almost non-existent, the cross-border modality continues to be a crucial part of the humanitarian response. It is a life-saving modality, as 2.67 million lives depend on cross-border humanitarian assistance. We note that the scrutiny of United Nations cross-border operations in Syria, as well as of the accountability mechanisms in place, is at a level similar to or higher than that in other comparable humanitarian operations.

Finally, I would like to commend the United Nations for its efforts with regard to the humanitarian situation. We look forward to hearing more in due course about the work on implementing the recommendations. We assure Mr. Ging and his staff of our full support.

The President: Of course, we will continue our dialogue on this issue. From 1 July we will all be in the able hands of the representative of Sweden.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8297

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8297th meeting
Wednesday, 27 June 2018, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Nebenzia/Mr. Safronkov	(Russian Federation)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Djédjé
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Tenya
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

Non-proliferation

Letter dated 12 June 2018 from the Security Council Facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/601)

Fifth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2231 (2015) (S/2018/602)

Letter dated 21 June 2018 from the Security Council Facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/624)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Non-proliferation

Letter dated 12 June 2018 from the Security Council Facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/601)

Fifth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2231 (2015) (S/2018/602)

Letter dated 21 June 2018 from the Security Council Facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/624)

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Germany to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs; and His Excellency Mr. João Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to the following documents: S/2018/601, which contains a letter dated 12 June 2018 from the Security Council Facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) addressed to the President of the Security Council; S/2018/602, which contains the fifth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2231 (2015); and S/2018/624, which contains a letter dated 21 June 2018 from the Security Council Facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) addressed to the President of the Security Council.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs; His Excellency Mr. João Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; and Ambassador Karel van Oosterom, Permanent Representative of the Netherlands, in his capacity as Security Council Facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015.).

I now give the floor to Ms. DiCarlo.

Ms. DiCarlo: Nearly three years ago, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2231 (2015) to endorse the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on the Iranian nuclear issue. The Secretary-General and the international community welcomed the Plan as a major achievement in nuclear non-proliferation.

Since implementation day, 16 January 2016, the International Atomic Energy Agency has reported 11 times to the Security Council that Iran has been implementing its nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA. Notwithstanding the continued adherence of Iran to its nuclear-related commitments, the agreement is unfortunately at a crossroads.

On 8 May, the United States of America announced its withdrawal from the agreement. The Secretary-General deeply regrets this setback to the JCPOA and believes that issues not directly related to the Plan should be addressed without prejudice to preserving the agreement and its accomplishments. At the same time, the Secretary-General calls on Iran to consider carefully the concerns expressed by Member States about Iranian activities that are allegedly contrary to the restrictive measures contained in annex B to the resolution.

I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to brief the Security Council on the fifth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) (S/2018/602). As guided by the Security Council, and consistent with our last four reports, the one before members today focuses on annex B to the resolution.

First, on the implementation of the nuclear-related provisions, I am pleased to report that the procurement channel continues to function effectively. Thirteen additional nuclear-related proposals have been submitted to the Security Council for approval, bringing the total number of proposals to 37 since implementation day. However, in this reporting period, the Secretariat received information from two Member States on the supply, sale, transfer or export to Iran of dual-use items that may have been undertaken contrary

to the resolution. The Secretariat has contacted the relevant Member States, which have informed us that they have initiated internal reviews. Iran, in its response to the Secretariat stressed that it is the "responsibility of the exporting State to seek approval through the procurement channel", and encouraged more outreach activities to address the lack of awareness among some Member States. The Secretary-General will report back on this issue to the Council in due course.

Secondly, in terms of ballistic missile-related provisions, the report reflects information provided by Israel and Iran to the Secretary-General and the Security Council on two ballistic missile launches by Iran in January, as well as our findings on the ballistic missiles launched by the Houthis into Saudi territory. Since our last report (S/2017/1030), Saudi authorities have brought to the attention of the Secretariat nine additional launches of ballistic missiles by the Houthis, which in their assessment were Iranian Qiam-1 missiles. The Secretariat was invited to examine the debris of three of those additional missiles. We provided preliminary observations, in our last report, from our examination of the debris of the missiles launched into Saudi Arabia on 22 July and 4 November 2017.

Based on the information and material analysed, the Secretariat assesses that the debris of the five missiles launched at Yanbu' and Riyadh since July 2017 share key design features with the Iranian Qiam-1 ballistic missile. It is also our assessment that some component parts of the debris were manufactured in Iran. We could confirm that subcomponents of the guidance system in these missiles were produced between 2002 and 2010. We note that the production-date range of these subcomponents is incompatible with Scud missiles known to be in Yemeni stockpiles prior to the outbreak of the current conflict in early 2015. However, we are at present unable to determine whether such missiles, or parts thereof, or related technology, may have been transferred from Iran after 16 January 2016, the date when annex B provisions came into effect.

The report also reflects information received from Israel regarding the possible presence of an Iranian drone in Syria, which was reportedly downed after entering Israeli airspace on 10 February. The Secretariat did not have the opportunity to examine its debris, but images provided by Israeli authorities show that its wing configuration appears to be consistent with that of an Iranian drone unveiled in October 2016. The report further notes that, according to Iranian media outlets, several Iranian drones have been deployed in Syria. The Secretariat has no information as to the owner and operator of those drones.

Thirdly, as detailed in the report, the Secretariat examined arms and related material that was seized in Bahrain after 16 January 2016, and obtained additional information on the unmanned surface vessel, laden with explosives, that was recovered by the United Arab Emirates. In both cases, the Secretariat is confident that some of the arms and related material it examined were manufactured in Iran. However, we are unable to confirm whether those items were transferred from Iran after 16 January 2016.

The report also notes the 21 May statement of the political leader of Hamas in the Gaza Strip that Iran has provided the Al-Qassam Brigades and other armed groups in Gaza with money, military equipment and expertise. That statement suggests that transfers of arms and related material from Iran may have been undertaken contrary to the provisions of annex B.

Fourthly, the report highlights the participation of Iran's Defence Industries Organization for the third year in a row in an arms and defence exhibition in Iraq. It provides information on the foreign activities of Khatam al Anbiya Construction Headquarters in Syria. Since both entities are on the 2231 list their funds, other financial assets and economic resources on the Iraqi and the Syrian territories should have been frozen.

The report also provides information on additional travel by Major General Qasem Soleimani. The Secretary-General has reiterated his call upon all Member States in the region to take the steps necessary to fully implement their obligations in relation to resolution 2231 (2015).

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the leadership of Ambassador Van Oosterom of the Netherlands in his role as Facilitator for the implementation of the resolution. I also thank the Coordinator of the Procurement Working Group of the Joint Commission for our excellent cooperation. I would like to assure them and the Security Council of our fullest support for the continued implementation of resolution 2231 (2015).

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Ms. DiCarlo for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Vale de Almeida.

Mr. Vale de Almeida: I thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the floor and the opportunity to brief the Security Council. I am honoured to once again address the Council on behalf of Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in her capacity as Coordinator of the Joint Commission established by the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

First, I would like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres and the Ambassador of the Netherlands, Facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015), for their excellent cooperation. Let me also express my gratitude to our colleagues of the Secretariat and the Security Council Affairs Division for their unwavering support, in particular regarding the running of the procurement channel. I would also like to note my appreciation for their work in the preparation of the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/602) on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015). Last, but not least, I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo for her briefing today.

We are in a difficult situation, which had not been foreseen back in July 2015 when resolution 2231 (2015) was unanimously adopted by the Security Council (see S/PV.7488). While the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has confirmed as recently as 24 May — for the eleventh time in a row — that Iran is respecting its nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA, United States President Trump announced on 8 May that the United States will withdraw from the agreement. The European Union (EU) and all other remaining JCPOA participants have expressed deep regret at that decision, including at the last meeting of the Joint Commission on 25 May.

The preservation of the JCPOA is a key security interest not only for the European Union, but also for the international community as a whole. The unanimous endorsement of the JCPOA by the Security Council confirmed the importance of the JCPOA in ensuring the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme. The recent messages of support expressed by an overwhelming number of partners around the world — in Africa, Asia, Latin America and in the Pacific — are yet another signal that the JCPOA needs to be preserved and fully implemented.

The full implementation of the JCPOA will prevent a nuclear arms race in the region. Such an arms race is in no one's interests. There is no positive alternative to the JCPOA, which is the fruit of more than 12 years of negotiations and constitutes a 104-page document that is endorsed at the highest level by the international community. Undoubtedly, it remains the standard of a multilateral nuclear non-proliferation agreement to which other initiatives still have to live up.

The EU has taken the position that, as long as Iran implements its nuclear-related obligations, we will remain firmly committed to the full and effective implementation of the JCPOA. That has also been echoed by the other remaining participants at the highest level, and in that regard I would like to express sincere thanks to the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China for their unwavering commitment to the nuclear deal. Their support in facing the global challenge of nuclear proliferation through the hard work of multilateral diplomacy cannot be overstated.

The remaining parties to the JCPOA have held a number of discussions on how to preserve the deal. We recognize that sanctions-lifting is an essential part of the agreement, and the Iranian people have a very understandable expectation that the benefits of the deal will continue to be felt. The European Union, together with its partners, will continue to employ its best efforts to preserve legitimate financial and trade flows, preserving the interests of businesses acting in good faith and with the endorsement of the Security Council. The measures that we are putting in place at home are designed to allow those businesses and investors to continue to do their work, as governed by international and European law.

We are of course aware that within Iran a difficult debate is being held on the JCPOA and on the benefits that it brings to the country and its citizens. I am convinced that those benefits continue to be tangible, even though I cannot hide the fact that there will be a number of companies that do not see themselves in a position to continue their current engagements in Iran. The European Union continues to explore with Iran the possibilities of preserving legitimate trade and investment and continuing our overall bilateral cooperation, which has taken place since 2016.

On the nuclear side, under the JCPOA Iran is undergoing the most rigorous monitoring and verification regime in the world. The IAEA issued on 24 May, as I mentioned earlier, its eleventh report since implementation day, which acknowledges once again Iran's full compliance with its commitments

undertaken under the JCPOA. That is further reflected by the large number of inspections on the ground. It goes without saying that, at this juncture, it is critical to strictly follow the terms of the deal. That is essential to upholding the agreement and continuing to build trust.

While the JCPOA deals with nuclear non-proliferation aspects, a number of serious issues outside of the deal continue to cast a shadow over our overall relationship with Iran. I regret that I have to stress again that the situation in the region has clearly worsened over the past few months.

Regarding the situation in Yemen, the European Union is seriously concerned about the recent intensification of military operations, in particular in Al-Hudaydah, and we have urged all parties to the conflict to ensure the protection of civilians and fully respect international humanitarian law. The European Union has also engaged in a regional dialogue with the stakeholders to urge the parties to support the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen and resume political negotiations. We note with concern the findings of the Secretary-General's report and the Panel of Experts on Yemen report (see S/2018/68) regarding the proliferation of ballistic missiles and technology. Those actions feed regional tensions and threaten the safety and stability of Yemen's neighbours, freedom of navigation and global sea trade.

As the Council is aware, the European Union has a long-standing track record of expressing its concern at the regional military build-up, including Iran's missile programme. We have repeatedly called upon Iran to refrain from activities that may deepen mistrust, such as ballistic missile tests, which are inconsistent with resolution 2231 (2015) and the statements associated with it.

The situation in the region, including the proliferation of ballistic missiles, needs to be addressed as a priority. But those issues are distinct from the JCPOA. Dismantling a nuclear deal that is working would certainly not put us in a better position to discuss other issues. Walking away from a robust non-proliferation agreement will not provide a solution to regional tensions or ballistic missile proliferation.

In addition to Iran's nuclear obligations, which are laid out in annex I of the JCPOA, and to elements related to sanctions-lifting, contained in annex 2, allow me to reiterate the need to further engage on the basis of annex 3 of the JCPOA, which foresees civil-nuclear cooperation. The European Union sees this annex as key to the overall balance of the agreement and essential to the overall objective of ensuring the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear programme.

We continue to engage with Iran in a number of concrete projects focused on nuclear safety and research, and we look forward to a civil nuclear liability seminar, to take place in Vienna in mid-July, and to the third high-level seminar on nuclear cooperation and governance, scheduled for November, building further on the concept that civil-nuclear cooperation and adherence to international norms on nuclear governance have to go hand in hand. While implementing projects on the ground and conducting research, Iran is also taking steps towards its accession to the international nuclear regulatory framework. Those steps need to be encouraged and supported further. All of the foregoing are significant measures that enhance the credibility of the international community with respect to the peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear programme.

Let me continue in this spirit by focusing on the reporting related to annex B of resolution 2231 (2015), in particular on the work of the Procurement Working Group, which is responsible for reviewing proposals by States seeking to engage in activities with Iran that are for nuclear and non-nuclear civilian end uses.

The procurement channel is a key pillar of the JCPOA. The procurement channel and the Procurement Working Group will continue their activity in the same spirit as our continued implementation of the other parts of the JCPOA. Since implementation day, the Procurement Working Group has been in full operation, with the EU reaching out and coordinating its meetings with the aim of promoting the Channel as the only mechanism for legitimate transfers of Nuclear Suppliers Group-listed items to Iran. After the United States withdrawal, the Group met twice in the new format of E3/EU+2 and Iran, and mandated the Working Group Coordinator to continue the work of the Channel as the only alternative to attempts for irregular transfers. It is a fact that confidence in the Channel can be built only if new proposals are officially received and reviewed. I therefore find it positive that the Channel currently has five proposals under review.

Transparency remains a guiding principle and cornerstone of the JCPOA. According to paragraph 6.10 of annex 4, the Joint Commission reports to the Security Council every six months on the status of

the Procurement Working Group's decisions and on any implementation issues. In that context, on 8 June the Coordinator of the Procurement Working Group submitted to the Facilitator, on behalf of the Joint Commission, its fifth biannual report. The report aims to provide the Facilitator and Security Council members with an overview of the work undertaken by the Procurement Working Group from 1 December 2017 to 12 June 2018. The report has been circulated in document S/2018/601.

During this period, the Procurement Working Group continued to discuss relevant topics, including end use, common outreach messaging and procedural aspects relevant to the smooth processing of the proposals. It also intensified efforts to be as transparent as possible, without compromising confidentiality, by reaching out to United Nations Member States and promoting a better understanding of its aims, objectives and its review process, which are embedded in the JCPOA's multilayered system of checks and balances.

Impressive outreach activities have been conducted over the past few years, and countries around the world are aware of the procedures of the channel. Therefore, it is regrettable, as reported by the Secretary-General, that some exports of listed items have been undertaken contrary to the provisions of paragraph 2 of annex B to resolution 2231 (2015). We see the need to further familiarize countries and potential exporters with the procurement channel. To that end, our outreach efforts will continue, together with colleagues from the Security Council secretariat and the Facilitator. Member States' governmental export-control stakeholders should continue supporting the engagement of their companies in any new transfers, through only the official channels.

Noting the challenges relating to the procurement channel in the wider JCPOA framework, we have no time for complacency. Immediate action is required to find a sustainable solution on overall trade with Iran, since that would also have an important impact on the procurement channel.

I wish to conclude my briefing with two further comments. Should the momentum on the JCPOA's preservation and implementation be lost, that would be very detrimental to Iran, all other remaining JCPOA parties and the wider international community, and it would damage the trust in the effectiveness of multilateral diplomacy and the non-proliferation architecture. That is why the European Union once again calls on the international community to support this internationally endorsed common engagement. All remaining signatory parties need to implement the JCPOA in full and resolution 2231 (2015) in all its dimensions. We need to continue to build on this achievement of multilateral diplomacy, which is the best hope for security and stability in the region. As ever, the Coordinator of the Joint Commission stands ready to work with United Nations bodies and Member States in order to support the objectives of the JCPOA.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Vale de Almeida for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Van Oosterom.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I now speak in my capacity as Security Council Facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015).

In July 2015, the Security Council adopted resolution 2231 (2015) (see S/PV.7488). Three months later, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) came into effect. The agreement aims to ensure that the Iranian nuclear programme remains exclusively peaceful. Resolution 2231 (2015) replaced previous Security Council resolutions on the Iranian nuclear issue and urged the full implementation of the JCPOA. It also established specific restrictions in relation to Iran. As Security Council Facilitator for the resolution, I have aimed to support and improve its implementation. I have built on the excellent work of Italy, which we succeeded as Facilitator in the context of our split term on the Council.

I consider three issues that we facilitate to be key to my role and that of the format: first, talks; secondly, transparency; and thirdly, trade.

My first point concerns talks. Our ambition is to facilitate talks about the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015). As Facilitator, I have facilitated communication among all parties, discussion of the Security Council in the 2231 format and smooth correspondence within the format. On 20 June, the Security Council met in the 2231 format and, during the format review, discussed the findings and recommendations contained in the fifth report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/602) on resolution 2231 (2015) prior to its public release. We had an open discussion on recent developments. In her statement, Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo has just elaborated on the findings and recommendations in the report.

During the reporting period, two Member States sent communications to the Council alleging transfers and activities by Iran that fall under the restrictions of resolution 2231 (2015). Those communications are listed in detail in my report (see S/2018/624), together with all replies received from the Permanent Mission of Iran, as well as a letter from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iran, Javad Zarif. The letter was sent in reaction to the withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA and the reimposition of all United States sanctions that had been lifted or waived in connection with the JCPOA.

I will now turn to my second point — the facilitation of transparency concerning the work of the 2231 format. My report gives a comprehensive overview of the work of the format during the past half-year, including the monitoring of the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015). It includes the relevant communications, as well as key aspects of the functioning of the procurement channel. It is also my intention to give an open briefing to the wider United Nations membership on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) in the next reporting period. The goal of such a briefing would be to raise awareness among Member States of resolution 2231 (2015), particularly of the procurement channel, as just described by the Head of Delegation of the European Union.

That brings me to my third point — the facilitation of trade by encouraging the use of the procurement channel. The Channel reviews proposals by States seeking to participate in or permit certain transfers of nuclear and dual-use goods, technology or services to Iran. On 27 April, the 2231 format received a briefing from the Coordinator of the Procurement Working Group of the Joint Commission on the procurement channel. Since the beginning of 2016, 37 proposals for the procurement channel have been submitted by five Member States from three different regional groups. Those include States that are not participants in the JCPOA. On average, proposals were processed in fewer than 51 calendar days. Following the withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA, the Council has continued to receive proposals through the Channel, and the review of those proposals continues.

In conclusion, the unanimous adoption of resolution 2231 (2015), which endorsed the JCPOA, marked a fundamental shift concerning the Iranian nuclear issue. As Security Council Facilitator for the resolution, I have aimed to support and improve its implementation through the facilitation of talks, transparency and trade. In that effort, I would also like to thank the Secretariat for its hard work in support of both myself and the format. We commend the leadership of Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Ambassador Vale de Almeida and their cooperation.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Ambassador Van Oosterom for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo, Ambassador Van Oosterom and Ambassador Vale de Almeida for their briefings today.

As has been noted, on 8 May, President Trump announced that the United States would end its participation in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear programme and instead pursue a comprehensive policy to both deny Iran all paths to a nuclear weapon and to counter the totality of the regime's malign activities.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/602) shows that Iran continues to destabilize the region through its support for terrorist groups and proxy forces. The findings and information presented in the Secretary-General's report paint a deeply troubling picture of the scope of this behaviour. We are particularly concerned by the detailed reporting that confirms numerous Iranian arms embargo violations across the Middle East and that certain nuclear dual-use items have been shipped to Iran outside of the agreed channels and without the required Security Council approval.

It is clear from the report that Iran bears responsibility for providing the Houthis with five ballistic missiles that they launched at civilian targets in Saudi Arabia. The United Nations also finds that seized weapons it inspected in Bahrain were manufactured in Iran, and confirms that an unmanned explosive boat recovered by the United Arab Emirates had systems with coordinates showing that it had been in Iranian territorial waters and that at least some of its components were manufactured in Iran. The report describes Iranian drones recovered in Yemen and Syria, and cites a televised interview with Hamas political leader Yahya Sinwar, in which he states that the Islamic Republic of Iran provided armed groups in Gaza with "money, [military] equipment, and

respective (S/2018/602, para. 45) before and after the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict.

Those unacceptable violations provide us with concrete evidence of how Iran is destabilizing the region and, in particular, prolonging the violence in Yemen. Adding up all of these data points leads to one unmistakable conclusion — that Iran continues to send weapons across the Middle East, in blatant violation of the Council's resolutions. If there was ever any doubt regarding Iran's clear threat to international peace and stability, the findings of the report should lay it to rest.

The only question remains, when confronted with all of the information presented by the Secretary-General in this and other reports: How will the States members of the Council respond? At a minimum, Iran has violated the provisions of resolutions 2231 (2015), 2216 (2015), 1701 (2006) and 1559 (2004). In those resolutions, we, the members of the Council, prohibited Iran from exporting weapons, and we prohibited the supply of weapons to the Houthis and to Hizbullah. Iran has defied and violated those provisions, in many cases openly. When confronted with a country that continually violates the Council's resolutions, it is imperative that we pursue meaningful consequences. That is why we urge members of the Council to join us in the imposition of sanctions that target Iran's malign behaviour in the region. The United States stands ready to work with the members of the Council to take real action against the threat that Iran poses.

The United States will continue to work with Member States and the Secretariat to shine a spotlight on Iran's behaviour. Reports like the one we are considering today are critical, and we encourage everyone to read it. With the reimposition of our sanctions, the United States is taking a stand. We have declared that Iran's actions will not go unchallenged, and we have shown that we will follow through. The United States is taking decisive action to ensure that Iran faces consequences as long as it remains bent on sowing instability. We urge the members of the Council to join us.

Standing up to Iran's destabilizing behaviour is a mission that all of us should have and share. When we look out at the region, we see Iran supporting the Houthis, Iran supporting Hizbullah, Iran supporting Hamas and Iran supporting the Al-Assad regime. Iran repeatedly comes up when we gather to discuss mass atrocities, humanitarian catastrophes or the launching of ballistic missiles. As long as Iran is the common denominator in so many conflicts across the region, we must respond. Any Member State concerned about promoting peace in the Middle East should do the same.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): Let me begin by thanking the Russian presidency of the Council for convening this important meeting. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo, our colleague of the Netherlands and the observer of the European Union for their very informative briefings.

I would also like to commend the factual and balanced nature of the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/602), which has been submitted to us and whose scope fully corresponds to his mandate.

The Security Council's responsibilities are measured by the variety and complexity of international peace and security issues it has to deal with, including non-proliferation. We spoke briefly about this issue two days ago during the debate on North Africa and the Middle East (see S/PV.8293), where the challenges are immense. In this context, the Iranian nuclear issue is a textbook case; it confirms the role of impetus and monitoring that the Security Council can and must play. This was demonstrated by the unanimous adoption of resolution 2231 (2015), on 20 July 2015, which sealed the agreement reached in Vienna, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), of which the Council is the guarantor.

The JCPOA is the result of the perseverance of the international community and a common will to provide a robust response to our shared security interests. The JPCOA also embodies the pragmatic and demanding multilateralism to which my country is deeply committed. The collapse of this major achievement would mark a serious step backwards for the region, for the non-proliferation regime, and for all of our security, which would potentially have serious consequences. This is why I want now to renew with force the commitment reaffirmed by President Macron alongside his British and German partners, and supported by the other Europeans, on 8 May. France, which has worked tirelessly throughout the negotiations to ensure the robust nature of this agreement, remains determined to ensure its implementation and preserve it.

In this regard, we have noted with regret and concern the decision of the United States to withdraw from the JCPOA. However, the agreement remains in place, and this decision should not affect the implementation by

the parties to this agreement of their commitments. France will continue to work with the parties involved in this collective framework. Let us be clear — as long as Iran fulfils its nuclear commitments under the JCPOA, France will meet its own. We are therefore determined to ensure as far as possible the maintenance of the economic relations with Iran permitted by the agreement. The agreement was designed specifically to ensure that Iran's nuclear programme is not diverted for military purposes. That founding goal continues to be met, as the Secretary-General recalls in his report. In accordance with its mandate, the International Atomic Energy Agency reconfirmed in its report of 24 May that Iran is in compliance with its commitments under the JCPOA.

I now come to my third point, which concerns resolution 2231 (2015) and the report before us. Our collective commitments do not end with the JCPOA framework. For its part, Iran must respect all its commitments under the resolution, including those under annex B. However, the Secretary-General's report identifies various elements of Iran's continued non-compliance with several of its provisions, which are sources of significant concern. I would refer to Iran's ballistic activities and the transfer of ballistic capabilities and technologies, in particular to the Houthis, as documented in the report of the Secretary-General. The Security Council has on several occasions condemned the firing of ballistic missiles against Saudi Arabia. This aspect is in addition to the information reported on seizures of weapons of probable Iranian origin and elements relating to violations of asset freezes and travel bans. However, I recall that all States, first and foremost Iran, must comply with those provisions of resolution 2231 (2015). In particular, any activity involving the transfer of assistance, missiles, technologies and ballistic capabilities to State or non-State actors is contrary to Security Council resolutions and must cease immediately.

In conclusion, I recall the importance of the JCPOA, which is both an essential instrument of the international non-proliferation regime and one of the cornerstones of stability in the region as a whole. Anything that weakens it therefore poses a direct risk to our collective security. The assurances given to us by the JCPOA in the nuclear field should enable us to address other issues of concern for regional security. This is the thrust of President Macron's proposal to engage in discussions towards a broader four-pillar agreement that preserves the JCPOA, provides a long-term framework for Iran's nuclear programme, constrains the most destabilizing developments in Iran's ballistic activities, and ensures that Iran ceases to play a destabilizing role in the region. I would assure Council members of France's full and clear commitment, alongside our partners, on these points, as well as on the implementation of all our commitments.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): At the outset, I would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo; the Facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015), Ambassador Karel van Oosterom; and the Head of the European Union Delegation, Ambassador João Vale de Almeida, for their informative briefings. I would also like to welcome to the Security Council today Ambassador Christoph Heusgen, Permanent Representative of Germany, and cordially wish him and his country every success as an incoming member of the Security Council.

Kazakhstan supports the Secretary-General in pointing out that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is the culmination of 12 years of intensive diplomatic efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive, long-term and proper solution of the Iranian nuclear problem. The extremely long and difficult multilateral negotiation process was a credit to the international community. My country has made a significant contribution to the process by organizing two rounds of negotiations between the E3+3 and Iran in Almaty in 2013.

Kazakhstan firmly and consistently supports the JCPOA on account of the following features. First, it is recognized by many as an unprecedented — and the only — way to ensure the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear programme. We consider it to be an important factor in securing the regime of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and strengthening regional and global peace and security.

Secondly, this historic nuclear deal is valuable as it fulfils its mission to, at a minimum, convince Iran stop enriching the uranium needed for nuclear weapons. It has given International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors access to facilities in Iran and put the nuclear programme under international control. IAEA reports confirm that Iran is in compliance with all requirements under the JCPOA.

Thirdly, the JCPOA is a truly practical and successful example of solving the most difficult issues

through negotiations, as it was developed and adopted through dialogue and in an atmosphere of trust.

We share the position of the Secretary-General and the overwhelming majority of States in regretting the decision by the United States to withdraw from the JCPOA and impose unilateral sanctions against Tehran. We believe that the concerns of the United States about Iran's ballistic activities and other issues should not prejudice or impede putting this multilateral agreement into effect. Furthermore, we would still like to see the fifth report (S/2018/602) presented in its most complete and comprehensive form, namely, by including both annexes of resolution 2231 (2015). Due attention has not been given to the content and provisions of annex A, which is the JCPOA. In order to give greater importance and proper political significance to the JCPOA, we suggest that resolution 2231 (2015), with both its annexes, be fully covered in future.

In addition, we note that notifications by some States Members of the United Nations in the report do not contain complete and irrefutable evidence that proves that Iran has violated the provisions of resolution 2231 (2015). They require further consideration, thorough investigation and closer and clearer coordination between the Council and the Secretariat so as to be able to effectively respond to such allegations.

At the same time, we recall that the Security Council, in paragraph 2 of resolution 2231 (2015), calls on all Member States as well as regional and international organizations to support the implementation of the JCPOA and refrain from actions that undermine the realization of the commitments under that agreement.

To conclude, I would like to congratulate the Facilitator, Ambassador Karel van Oosterom of the Netherlands, on his first briefing and to commend his committed and tireless efforts to ensure that resolution 2231 (2015) fulfils its objectives. We support his endeavours to consistently maintain transparency, a constructive and inclusive approach and optimal operationalization of the 2231 format.

Kazakhstan will continue to advocate for preserving and further implementing the agreement, to which we do not see any alternative. We are convinced that political and diplomatic solutions are the only way to resolve all the issues pertaining to the Iranian nuclear programme.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I wish to thank our three briefers today. This is an important issue, so I thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this debate.

For the United Kingdom's part, we welcome the thorough and well-evidenced report on the ongoing implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) (S/2018/602). We are aware of the criticism that has been made of the report in some quarters, but we consider the scope and the methodology of the report to be both appropriate and robust. We offer our thanks to the Secretariat for its continued work to ensure the proper implementation of this resolution of such importance for regional and international peace and security.

My intervention, like the issue itself, comes in two halves: what happens with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and what happens in respect of the region and regional stability.

With respect to the JCPOA, we join the Secretary-General and my French colleague in regretting the United States decision to leave the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and to reimpose United States sanctions on Iran. For the United Kingdom's part, we remain committed to the nuclear deal. It is an essential part of the global non-proliferation architecture, and, furthermore, the deal is working. As we have just heard, the latest report of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) confirms that Iran continues to comply with its nuclear obligations under the deal, as indeed it has since implementation day. This is consistent with the previous 10 IAEA reports, and we believe that it demonstrates the Iranian commitment to the nuclear deal.

We expect this commitment to continue. We expect Iran to continue to abide by its obligations under the deal. In return, the United Kingdom, together with the remaining participants in the deal, will take the steps necessary to ensure that Iran continues to receive economic benefits from sanctions relief. We welcome the update on the activities of the procurement channel. The United Kingdom fully supports and remains committed to the procurement channel process.

While the JCPOA remains vital for our national security, and indeed for the stability of the Middle East, it is only one part of the efforts towards long-term stability and peace in the region. The United Kingdom shares the Secretary-General's view that issues not directly related to the nuclear deal should be addressed

without prejudice to preserving the agreement. We believe that these issues can most effectively be addressed while the nuclear deal remains in place.

I will now turn to the second half of today's debate: the regional picture. I listened very carefully to the briefing given by the Under-Secretary-General in particular, but also by the two other speakers. It is true that the Secretary-General's latest report contains concerning reports of attempted shipments to Iran of certain dual-use items without the necessary prior approval from the Security Council. We call on the United Nations to investigate these alleged transfers further and to report its findings to the Council.

We also note the Secretary-General's assessment that ballistic-missile technology used by the Houthi in Yemen was transferred from Iran, as previously set out in the Yemen Panel of Experts report (see S/2018/68). This chimes with our own assessment. The United Kingdom considers these transfers to be in contravention of resolutions 2231 (2015) and 2216 (2015). The proliferation of missile technology is destabilizing for the region and needs to cease, in the interest of Iran, in the interest of regional stability, and in the interest of international peace and security.

In addition, we remain concerned by Iran's testing of missiles that are designed to be capable of delivering a nuclear warhead.

It was not my intention today to talk about the wider Iranian role in the region, but I would just like to echo what my United States colleagues said about some of the activities undertaken by Iran in places such as Lebanon and Syria.

I should like to be very clear about the United Kingdom's position. Iran is an ancient, respected and mature civilization. It has legitimate security interests in the region and deserves a proper place in the global multilateral system. However, the way it pursues and prosecutes these interests is too often destabilizing and too often threatening to its neighbours and threatening to others, including those of us in Europe. Supplying missiles for attacks on regional neighbours has no legitimacy. Transferring threatening technology has no legitimacy, nor does importing dual-use equipment without the Security Council's prior approval. And while we recognize Iran's national security interests, there is no legitimacy or justification for Iran testing missiles that are designed to be capable of delivering a nuclear warhead. Furthermore, diverting Iran's public finances into such adventures retards its own ability to modernize its economy and deliver services to its people.

After 9/11, which struck this city, I worked very closely with the Iranian Government. We were on the same side in combating terrorism. It is a matter of lasting regret that Iran has chosen a different course of action in the intervening years. What I would like to do is to join others in taking the opportunity today to urge Iran to refrain from the destabilizing behaviour that the report outlines and that we have talked about today, and in particular to make a material contribution to the political process in Yemen that the United Nations is so bravely undertaking.

To conclude, the United Kingdom's position on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is clear. It is a critical agreement that makes the world a safer place. It is vital for our security, and we remain committed to it. To that end, the United Kingdom, and, we believe, our European partners, will continue to work with the remaining parties to the deal to maintain it.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I should like to start by thanking Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo, Ambassador Karel van Oosterom and Ambassador Vale de Almeida for their briefings on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015). I wish also to acknowledge the presence here with us of our colleague the Permanent Representative of Germany, whose country has a critical role in the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

We note from the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/602) that the Islamic Republic of Iran continues to adhere to its nuclear-related commitments and the Secretary-General has not received any report on the supply, transfer or export to Iran of nuclear or dual-use items, materials, equipment, goods or technology. We also note that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) continues to monitor and verify the implementation of the nuclear-related commitments by the Islamic Republic of Iran. The continued cooperation of the IAEA with the Islamic Republic of Iran and the JCPOA-participating States will also remain very critical for the full implementation of the nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA.

We welcome the smooth cooperation between the Security Council and the Joint Commission as indicated in the report of the Facilitator (see S/2018/601). We also welcome the continued work of the procurement channel

in approving the proposal submitted to it. The planned open briefing to the wider United Nations membership on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) by the Facilitator is commendable as it will contribute to fostering awareness particularly with the activities set forth in paragraph 2 of annex B to resolution 2231 (2015) and the procurement channel.

We share the view of the Secretary-General that the JCPOA is

> "a major achievement in nuclear non-proliferation that has contributed to regional and international peace and security." (*S/2018/602, para. 3*)

However, we recognize the challenges and difficulties in the broader implementation of resolution 2231 (2015), particularly the reported activities allegedly undertaken by the Islamic Republic of Iran contrary to the restrictive measures set out in annex B to resolution 2231 (2015) and the key findings included in the reports of the Secretary-General and the Facilitator. While awaiting further information on those reported activities allegedly undertaken by the Islamic Republic of Iran, we share the view expressed by the Secretary-General that the Islamic Republic of Iran needs to carefully consider these concerns, as they have the potential to impact the context within which the JCPOA is being implemented.

It is also worth noting the difficulty associated with the withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA. We share the view of the Secretary-General, highlighted in his report, that it is a setback to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. In that regard, we appreciate the commitment of the remaining participating countries, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, to fully implement the JCPOA. It is critical for the remaining JCPOA participants to continue to address challenges associated with the withdrawal and contribute to the full implementation of the JCPOA and the satisfactory conclusion of the issue.

I would like to end my remarks by encouraging the remaining participating countries to continue to work together to address some of the challenges aimed at ensuring the full implementation of resolution 2231 (2015).

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): First of all, I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo, Ambassador Van Oosterom and Ambassador Vale de Almeida for their briefings and to express my appreciation for their work.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear programme represents an important achievement of multilateralism and a success story in addressing international and regional hotspot issues through political and diplomatic means. It has played an important role in upholding the international nuclear non-proliferation regime and promoting peace and stability in the Middle East. As such, it is generally welcome by the international community.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has reported 11 times in a row that Iran has been implementing its nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA. The coordination between the Security Council and the Procurement Channel is working as expected. The experience in the past three years has fully shown that the JCPOA is an effective agreement.

China commends the efforts of all the parties concerned to implement the JCPOA and expresses regret with regard to the withdrawal of the United States from the agreement. China calls on all parties to assume a responsible attitude, bear in mind the long-term and broader situation, commit to patiently engaging in dialogue and cooperation in order to preserve the seriousness and authority of the JCPOA, and resolve issues through dialogue and negotiation.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/602) is an important component of the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) and the JCPOA. The report welcomes the commitment of the parties concerned to maintain the full implementation of the JCPOA and reflects Iran's effort to implement the agreement in an objective manner, which China acknowledges.

China has also noted that, in his report, the Secretary-General expressed his deep regret with regard to the withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA. In the meantime, China believes that the report of the Secretary-General should reflect the implementation efforts in an objective, balanced and comprehensive manner, and take the legitimate concerns of Iran into a consideration. The Secretariat should act in strict accordance with its mandates and functions.

China appreciates the work done by Ambassador Van Oosterom and his team in his capacity as Facilitator of the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015). China has taken note of the report submitted by the Joint

Commission to the Security Council on the work of the Procurement Working Group, and will continue to take an active part in the work of the Joint Commission and the Procurement Working Group.

China consistently stands for the settlement of the Iranian nuclear issue through political and diplomatic means and is committed to the strengthening of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime and the maintenance of international and regional peace and stability. China will objectively, impartially and responsibly maintain its dialogue with all parties concerned to continue to preserve and implement the JCPOA.

Mr. Djédjé (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo and Mr. João Vale de Almeida for their edifying briefings. I also congratulate our colleague Ambassador Karel van Oosterom for the work he has done in his capacity as the Facilitator entrusted by the Security Council to promote the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015).

Almost three years after its adoption by Germany, France, the United Kingdom, China, the United States of America, the Russian Federation, the European Union and the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which in the view of my delegation is one of the best achievements in the field of nuclear non-proliferation, has reached an impasse.

In adopting resolution 2231 (2015), the Security Council sought, inter alia, to guarantee the exclusively civilian character of Iran's nuclear programme, in accordance with article IV of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). My delegation believes that this agreement constitutes a solid foundation for the implementation of the NPT and that bringing it into question is likely to undermine the collective efforts of the international community to find a peaceful solution to the Iranian nuclear issue. Moreover, it calls on all stakeholders to resolve all disagreements relating to the implementation of the provisions of the JCPOA through negotiations within the Joint Commission provided for in annex 4 of the agreement.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the function and findings of which play a pivotal role in the Iranian dossier, has admirably discharged its obligations since 2015, as demonstrated by the 11 reports that it has issued since then. In its most recent reports, the IAEA has once again pointed out the successful implementation of the 2015 agreement owing to the frequent inspections in Iran, which have confirmed limited uranium enrichment exclusively for civilian use and the provisional implementation of its Additional Protocol to its Safeguards Agreement. The IAEA, which has not discovered any violation concerning restrictions placed on Iran's ballistic missile-related activities, pursuant to paragraph 3 of annex B of Resolution 2231 (2015), has also indicated the non-diversion of declared nuclear material and the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities.

Furthermore, the successful implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was just reaffirmed by the 12 June fifth semi-annual report (S/2018/602) of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the provisions of resolution 2231 (2015). My country welcomes its recommendations concerning the strengthening of capacities of States Members to better avail themselves of the procurement channel and the full compliance of States of the region with their obligations pursuant to resolution 2231 (2015). In that light, Côte d'Ivoire believes that Iran's implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is satisfactory, although, as with all agreements, there is still room for improvement.

My delegation believes that it is essential that all concerns involving the implementation of the Plan of Action be addressed through mechanisms established for that purpose, in particular within the framework of the Joint Commission provided for in annex 4 of the agreement. My country therefore urges all parties to the Iranian nuclear agreement to return to the negotiating table, and calls on them to respect their respective commitments fully, while at the same time keeping in mind the importance of strengthening international security through the comprehensive implementation of the agreement, which has led to significant progress concerning the Iranian issue. Moreover, Côte d'Ivoire calls on the Islamic Republic of Iran to pay particular attention to the concerns raised by other States, especially the countries of the Middle East region, and to increase its cooperation with the IAEA. It also calls on Iran to comply with the travel ban and asset freeze provisions of the relevant Security Council resolutions in good faith.

In conclusion, my delegation believes that, with regard to the Iranian dossier, the effectiveness of the

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, as well as the IAEA verification regime, has made the agreement into a diplomatic success, which the international community must work arduously to preserve. In that regard, it welcomes all initiatives aimed at finding a peaceful and lasting solution that is satisfactory for all those who have a stake in the Iranian nuclear issue.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to thank all of today's briefers — Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo; Ambassador João Vale de Almeida; and Ambassador Karel van Oosterom, in his capacity as Security Council Facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) — for their respective reports.

We believe that it is in our common interest to stabilize the situation in the Middle East, reduce tension in the region and, most important, prevent the further proliferation of nuclear weapons. In our view, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is an important step towards achieving the objective of a nuclear non-proliferation, as it provides the international community with verification mechanisms to monitor the Iranian nuclear programme. Moreover, it has become an important element of the global non-proliferation architecture.

Poland welcomes the fifth semi-annual report (S/2018/602) of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015). We note that the International Atomic Energy Agency has reported that Iran is implementing its nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA and the fact that the Agency itself continues to verify the non-diversion of declared nuclear material and the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran.

We call on Iran to continue to implement the Additional Protocols to its Safeguards Agreement. It is important for Iran to continue to abide by the terms of the JCPOA. The recent declaration by Iran about increasing its capacity to produce uranium hexafluoride does not constitute a violation of the agreement, but neither does it contribute to building confidence. At the same time, Poland shares concerns about Iranian activities undertaken that run contrary to the provisions of annex B contained in resolution 2231 (2015), as accurately reported by the Secretary-General. The JCPOA does not explicitly prohibit the development of delivery systems, or address the question of Iranian influence in the region, which some countries perceive as negative. In that connection, Iran should refrain from actions that are not in spirit of the JCPOA and could undermine the implementation of commitments under the Plan. The series of short- and medium-range ballistic missile tests conducted by Iran and reported missile transfers, as well as some of Iran's other activities in the region, are a source of concern for us. They risk deepening mistrust and are inconsistent with the spirit of resolution 2231 (2015).

We recognize the procurement channel and the Procurement Working Group as essential parts of the JCPOA and a significant transparency measure under the Plan. Poland supports the procurement channel and believes that its proper functioning ensures conformity of the relevant transfers in connection with the JCPOA and resolution 2231 (2015) and contributes to supporting the non-proliferation regime.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Ambassador Karel van Oosterom for his balanced and scrupulous report. I would like to recognize his diligent efforts in facilitating the important, yet challenging, format of the Security Council by — as he described — promoting talks, transparency and trade in order to fully implement resolution 2231 (2015).

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I am now speaking in my national capacity.

First, let me welcome our German colleague to the Security Council. I will make three points concerning, first, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA); secondly, Iran's ballistic missile programme and its role in the region; and, thirdly, the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015).

Let me turn to my first point — the JCPOA. The JCPOA is a major diplomatic accomplishment and a key non-proliferation achievement. It has been unanimously endorsed by the Security Council via resolution 2231 (2015). For the Kingdom of the Netherlands, preserving that robust and effective agreement is a clear priority. It is crucial for the security of the region, Europe and the entire world, and the JCPOA has been delivering on its objective, which is to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons — an obligation it also has under the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The JCPOA is based on solid verification. Inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) spend more than 3,000 calendar days per year on the ground in Iran and monitor more than 25 locations in Iran on a 24/7 basis. That is an important IAEA endeavour to which my country has contributed more than €1.5 million. The

inspection regime has resulted in eleven consecutive IAEA reports, which confirm that Iran is living up to its commitments under the JCPOA.

It is in that light that we deeply regret the decision of the United States to withdraw from the agreement. We believe that this international agreement effectively blocks the route to an Iranian nuclear weapon. It is better than any alternative. That is why we call on the JCPOA participants to remain committed to the agreement.

That brings me to my second point, the position of Iran. Whereas Iran fulfils its nuclear commitments, the Kingdom of the Netherlands shares the concerns voiced by others today about its ballistic missile programme and its destabilizing role in the region. Iran mingles in the internal affairs of other countries and supports armed groups. We strongly condemn any Iranian involvement in the missiles fired on Saudi Arabia by the Houthis from Yemen. We also note with concern the continuation of arms transfers, as well as violations of the asset freeze and travel ban, in violation of resolution 2231 (2015). We call on Iran to refrain from any such activities, to fully implement resolution 2231 (2015) and to engage in serious dialogue on these concerns outside the framework of the JCPOA.

As long as Iran remains committed to the JCPOA, the international community should do so as well. Therefore, as my third point, I wish to call on the entire international community to continue to support and implement resolution 2231 (2015), including the JCPOA. The international community should ensure that Iran continues to benefit from the agreement as was foreseen, including trade — if appropriate, via the procurement channel. The Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to play its part to ensure the full implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) — nationally, as a member of the European Union, and as a facilitator for resolution 2231 (2015) here in New York this year.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of the Netherlands sees it as a clear priority that the JCPOA participants, including Iran and the wider international community, remain committed to resolution 2231 (2015), including the JCPOA — especially now that the agreement faces serious challenges. At the same time, Iran should address international concerns regarding its ballistic missile programme and its destabilizing role in the region.

The JCPOA showed that the international community can come together and solve even the most complex of issues. It showed that it is possible to overcome differences through dialogue and diplomacy. It is a clear example of effective multilateralism. Ensuring the continued implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) is in the interest of the Iranian people, of the region and of us all.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, my delegation would like to express its gratitude to Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs; Ambassador Karel van Oosterom of the Netherlands, as Facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015); and Mr. João Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, on behalf of the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, as Coordinator of the Joint Commission, for their comprehensive briefings.

Almost three years ago (see S/PV.7488), the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2231 (2015), which endorsed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), thereby marking a fundamental change in its consideration of Iranian nuclear issues and building a bridge to foster trust in the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian programme. The Government of Equatorial Guinea shares the positive view of the Secretary-General on this agreement in his report (S/2018/602). We also applaud the efforts of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in monitoring the agreement, as it has made apparent that the successes and the work of the last 20 years have been worth it.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has shown its total commitment, pursuant to the JCPOA, to the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015). My Government welcomes that achievement, as characterized by the IAEA. Like the Secretary-General in his report on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015), we encourage the authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran to conduct an in-depth review of the concerns of the Commission and other States with regard to the use of ballistic missiles. Even though that issue is not covered in the Plan, it affects the overall perception of the Plan, which is key to the effective and efficient implementation of resolution 2231 (2015).

On 8 May, President Donald Trump announced the withdrawal of the United States from the Plan and the reimposition of all sanctions that his country had lifted on Iran. Although that decision is a regrettable setback to significant progress in the implementation of the

Plan, the Government of Equatorial Guinea urges all parties to continue carrying out their responsibilities and obligations, thereby preserving an agreement that has contributed to regional and international peace and security.

Iranian authorities must abstain from any activity that could undermine the full implementation of the resolution 2231 (2015). We encourage all parties to the Plan to continue honouring it. Any discrepancy with regard to the implementation of the Plan must be resolved through negotiations.

Finally, we wish to stress once again our understanding that the agreement ensures the peaceful uses of the Iranian nuclear programme and helps consolidate the nuclear non-proliferation regime in the region.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation wishes to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, and the Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, Mr. João Vale de Almeida, for their briefings. We also thank the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands, Mr. Karel van Oosterom, for the detailed information he provided in relation to his work as Facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015). Finally, we welcome the participation of the Permanent Representative of Germany in this session.

I begin by stressing that Bolivia is part of the first densely populated region of the world that is completely free of nuclear weapons and, as provided for in the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean, we have assumed the responsibility of contributing, to the best of our ability, to ending the arms race — especially nuclear — and to consolidating international peace and security. In that regard, we attend this meeting convinced that we have an obligation to the international community to join forces so that the Middle East can join the five nuclear-weapon-free zones of the world.

Bolivia firmly reaffirms its commitment to the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015), in the understanding that it represents an unmistakable diplomatic achievement with respect to nuclear non-proliferation and a manifestation of the capacity of States when we are committed to multilateralism and international law. In that context, we reiterate the right of the peoples of the world, without exception, to research, produce and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, in accordance with articles I and II of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the principles laid down by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

My delegation believes that the 12 years of intense diplomatic activity that led to an agreement on the Iranian nuclear issue and that resulted in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which the Security Council endorsed through the unanimous adoption of resolution 2231 (2015), cannot be postponed by the unilateral decision of one State that jeopardizes the implementation of the Plan. In that order of priorities, like many other representatives, we regret the announcement on 8 May by the United States Government of its withdrawal from the agreement and its reimposition of the unilateral sanctions that had been lifted or had been subject to exemptions, in accordance with the JCPOA. Bolivia categorically condemns unilateral sanctions, which are a flagrant violation of multilateralism and a serious threat to the international order, constituting as they do illegal measures that impose one State's jurisdiction and internal legislation on another's, violating the principles of equality, sovereignty and the territorial integrity of States. We are concerned about the possibility that that decision could affect the Plan of Action, with consequences that would have implications for the whole world, not just the Middle East. In that regard, we believe that we should be able to create a climate of mutual trust among States given the denuclearization proposals that are currently being negotiated, as is the case with the Korean peninsula.

Despite all of this, we want to emphasize the decision of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to continue to abide by its commitments under the JCPOA. We also commend the support of the other signatories to the JCPOA to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in the region, as expressed on 25 May in Vienna, and to the continuing, full and effective implementation of the Plan of Action. In that regard, it is the responsibility of the Security Council to uphold the agreement exactly as it was envisaged, guaranteeing reciprocal commitments for its full good-faith implementation in a constructive atmosphere based on mutual respect. In that context, the Council members are the main guarantors preventing any action that could undermine the Plan of Action. We support any initiative of the Secretary-General that ensures the validity of the JCPOA.

As on other occasions, we are interested in seeing more in-depth information in future reports regarding annex A, since annexes A and B are both integral and complementary to the effective implementation of resolution 2231 (2015).

Finally, as a peaceful country, Bolivia reaffirms its commitment to preventive diplomacy, multilateralism, non-interference and respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of States, in the understanding that those are universal principles recognized by the international community.

Mr. Tenya (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to express our gratitude for the convening of this meeting and for the briefings by Mrs. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Ambassador Karel van Oosterom, in his capacity as Facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015), and Ambassador João Pedro Vale de Almeida. We also welcome the presence of the Permanent Representative of Germany at today's meeting.

As a country committed to multilateralism, international law and the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes, Peru gives high priority to safeguarding the nuclear non-proliferation regime, including as it concerns delivery systems, as well as to promoting disarmament and arms control. We therefore affirm the importance of the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) for the Iranian nuclear programme, achieved thanks to the unity that the members of the Council were able to maintain with regard to that issue for years and adopted unanimously under resolution 2231 (2015), which is still in force.

In the circumstances, we would like to commend the commitment of the parties to preserving the agreement and the need to safeguard it. We express our appreciation and support for the verification and monitoring work of the International Atomic Energy Agency. We also want to underline the importance of ensuring that Iran continues to fulfil its obligations in that sensitive area. We take due note of the Iranian compliance, as mentioned by the Secretary-General in his fifth biannual reports (S/2018/601, S/2018/602 and S/2018/624) on the implementation of the JCPOA. We also emphasize the importance of duly investigating the allegations mentioned in the most recent report (S/2017/1030) on the alleged violations of paragraph 2 of annex B to resolution 2231 (2015).

We also underscore the importance of continuing to verify that in accordance with paragraph 3 of annex B to resolution 2231 (2015), Iran does not undertake any ballistic-missile-related activity aimed at launching nuclear weapons, including launches that use such ballistic-missile technology. We believe that the Iranian ballistic-missile programme has the potential to increase regional tensions. We therefore believe that it is important that the Iranian authorities act with extreme prudence. We are particularly concerned about the reports of the alleged delivery of missiles or ballistic technology to the Houthis in Yemen. In that regard, we support the Secretary-General's proposal to conduct additional outreach and training activities for Member States on the procedures and requests that must be submitted through the Procurement Working Group.

We also believe it appropriate to recall the obligations of all States, pursuant to resolution 2231 (2015), with regard to the bans on travel and the transfer of arms and related materiel, and the freezing of assets of the persons and entities listed in the resolution's attachments.

In conclusion, I affirm Peru's commitment to the non-proliferation regime, the need to maintain the unity of the Council around its responsibility to ensure the full effectiveness of that regime and its importance for maintaining international peace and security.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank Mrs. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for her briefing on the biannual report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) (S/2018/602). I would also like to thank my colleague the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands, in his capacity as Facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015), and the observer of the European Union for their briefings. And we welcome the participation of the Permanent Representative of Germany in this meeting.

We meet today on the agenda item of nuclear non-proliferation to discuss the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015), against the backdrop of the reports under consideration (S/2018/601, S/2018/602 and S/2018/624), and in the wake of the recent developments with regard to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the decision of the United States to withdraw from it. My delegation has reviewed the three reports before us, including the content of the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/602) on

Iran's implementation of its commitments regarding its nuclear programme. We welcome its assertions about that implementation in accordance with the nuclear agreement, as mentioned in the reports of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that have been submitted to the Security Council since January 2016 (see S/2018/624). In that regard, we affirm that Iran should continue to meet all its commitments under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the IAEA Safeguards Agreement. Iran should also quickly ratify the Additional Protocol in order to maintain its position as a non-nuclear State.

The State of Kuwait supports all ongoing efforts to ensure security and stability in the region, which has long endured turbulence and war. However, we want to emphasize our firm position on all non-proliferation issues in general, and specifically on declaring the Middle East a zone free of weapons of mass destruction. Nearly three years ago, the State of Kuwait welcomed the adoption of the agreement on Iran's nuclear programme under the JCPOA (see S/PV.7488), although we believe that it does not address all the concerns of the region. However, in the spirit of cooperation and support for diplomatic efforts, at the time we expressed the hope that the agreement would help to promote security and stability in the Middle East. Notwithstanding the deteriorating security situation in the Middle East, the ongoing interference in the region's internal affairs and the destabilization of security and stability at the regional level, we believe that it is important to support and encourage all the parties to the agreement to uphold it and implement its provisions. The State of Kuwait respects and abides by Council resolutions. Nonetheless, the grounds for the withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA must be highlighted in order to address all the regional and international concerns related to that agreement.

We are concerned about the findings of the Secretariat involved in the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) pertaining to the ballistic missiles fired at Saudi Arabia from Yemen, as well as the issues related to the transfer of arms and military equipment to other States in the region. Although the Secretariat was unable to determine dates for the arms transfers that are mentioned in the report, it remains a very serious issue that threatens security and stability in the region. In that regard, we reiterate our condemnation in the strongest terms of firing ballistic missiles at the sister Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as they are a threat to its national security and the civilian facilities of our sister countries in the Gulf.

We underscore the position of the League of Arab States in its last summit, which calls for maintaining security and stability in the countries of the region, ensuring the safety of their peoples, committing to non-interference in the internal affairs of States, respecting their sovereignty and maintaining good neighbourliness, in accordance with international instruments and norms. Meanwhile all acts of provocation that undermine trust and threaten security and stability in the region must cease.

In conclusion, the State of Kuwait reaffirms that the Security Council should continue to shoulder its responsibilities.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): I too would like to thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo, Ambassador Van Oosterom and Ambassador Vale de Almeida for their useful briefings and reports to the Security Council today.

We welcome the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) (S/2018/602), which endorses the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear programme. The nuclear agreement with Iran was negotiated over a period of 12 years and was a success for diplomacy and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. It has also been endorsed by the Security Council. As we have consistently stated, its continued implementation is crucial. The agreement has ensured the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear programme, which in itself contributes to stability in the region and beyond. In that regard, we note that Iran continues to fulfil its nuclear-related obligations, according to the most recent report of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

It is for that reason that as we have stated previously, we deeply regret the decision by the United States to withdraw from the agreement. Its withdrawal poses a serious risk to the international peace and security architecture and could have negative repercussions for gobal non-proliferation efforts. The European Union (EU) is unified in its full support for the deal and its implementation. Sweden and the EU will work to preserve the JCPOA. It is vital to ensure that the deal continues to be respected and that Iran continues to fulfil its commitment.

We remain seriously concerned about reported violations by Iran of the arms embargo and the travel ban put in place under resolution 2231 (2015). Any new information pertinent to such cases should be verified by the Secretariat. We have also expressed our concern about the previously reported ballistic-missile launches, which we believe to be inconsistent with resolution 2231 (2015). We echo the Secretary-General's call on all Member States of the region to take the necessary steps to fully implement their obligations in relation to resolution 2231 (2015), including those on the travel ban, as well as on asset freezes on individuals and entities on the list maintained pursuant to the resolution. We would appreciate further information in future reports with regard to the reported seizure and transfer of dual-use items to Iran without the prior approval of the Security Council.

There is strong EU support for broad relations and dialogue with Iran, including on regional issues, the worrisome human rights situation and the principles of the rule of law. All actors in the region, including Iran, must come together to de-escalate tensions and contribute to finding political solutions to the ongoing conflicts and crises in the region. However, those matters should be treated as separate from the JCPOA and resolution 2231 (2015).

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Russian Federation.

We would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo for presenting the biannual report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) (S/2018/602). We also note the effective work being done by Mr. Karel van Oosterom, Permanent Representative of the Netherlands, as Facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015). We would also like to thank Mr. Vale de Almeida for his briefing.

We fully agree with the Secretary-General in his report when he states that he deeply regrets the withdrawal of the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and points out that issues not within the scope of the agreement should not be used as a pretext for dismantling it. In that regard, we would like to recall that the Russian Federation has frequently taken the floor in the Council to condemn the irresponsible attempts by the United States to torpedo the JCPOA and has expressed the hope that reason would nonetheless prevail and issues of global security and stability would no longer be held hostage to Washington's internal political processes. Now, following the withdrawal of the United States from the agreement, we are obliged to conclude that our calls went unheeded and that the unique potential of the JCPOA, which has not been allowed to function at full strength, is under threat. Furthermore, the step taken by the American side will do serious harm both to the nuclear non-proliferation regime and to the interests of security in the Middle East.

Considering the significance that the unilateral actions by the United States have for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) and the JCPOA, we were astonished that the report mentions it only in passing. It is simply unfathomable that it was possible to draft a document entitled "Implementation of resolution 2231 (2015)" with no mention whatever of the fact that Washington's reimposition of unilateral sanctions is a direct violation not only of its obligations under the JCPOA, but also of resolution 2231 (2015).

It is also striking that in referencing the resolution's call to all Member States to support the implementation of the JCPOA and refrain from actions that could undermine it, the report completely ignores the public statements by the leadership of the United States and a number of other countries that fly in the face of that position. We are surprised at the complete absence in the report of any mention that Tehran has started a dispute-settlement process under the JCPOA related to the irresponsible actions of the United States, which the Security Council and the Secretary-General were duly informed in a letter of 11 May from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iran. In general, the report is overtly unbalanced and more like a collection of unproven accusations about Iran than an attempt to paint an objective picture of the situation concerning the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015), an approach that is all the more incomprehensible considering that none of the examples of Tehran's alleged violations of the resolution have been confirmed, owing to insufficient information and the lack of a firm body of proof.

We are once again compelled to point out that it is unacceptable for the Secretariat to carry out any so-called investigations of potential violations of resolution 2231 (2015) without a clear mandate from the Security Council, as provided for in paragraph 6 of the note by the President dated 16 January 2016 (S/2016/44). We again emphasize that Secretariat staff do not have the

qualifications or expertise for analysing and evaluating missile systems or conventional weapons. In our view, therefore, the technical information in the report on the study of the missile components in Saudi Arabia that were fired from Yemen proves nothing and is simply groundless, while there was no independent expert analysis of the Secretariat's conclusions. On top of that, the very fact and the timeline of Iran's alleged transfers of the ballistic-missile systems or their components to the Houthis have not been established, as the report emphasizes. The report therefore indicates an absence of any of the elements that constitute a violation. The same applies to the Secretariat's illegitimate inspections in Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.

In the absence of any facts pointing to a violation of the requirements of resolution 2231 (2015), the need for the inclusion in the report of a reference to the facts of the participation of Iran's Defence Industries Organization in a foreign arms exhibition in Iraq, or of a memorandum of understanding between the Iranian construction company Khatam al-Anbiya and the Syrian authorities, raises serious questions. We must continue to insist that the report should not contain information from open sources or references to unverified or unverifiable information provided by individual countries, especially when it is not even being brought to the attention of the members of the Security Council. We believe such practices are completely unacceptable and consider them malicious attempts to create a groundlessly negative climate around Iran by circumventing the Council.

In connection with all of this, we would like to remind the Secretariat yet again that paragraph 7 of the note by the President of 16 January 2016 provides for semi-annual reports on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) as a whole, not its individual parts. We hope that future reports will be prepared strictly in line with the existing mandate and that all activities that run counter to the Council's decisions, in particular the entry into force of the unilateral measures announced by the United States on 8 May, will receive due attention.

At this point, the only way of preserving the agreement is the conscientious implementation by all the remaining States participating in it of the obligations they voluntarily undertook. In that context, I would like to note that there is clear evidence in the Secretary-General's report of Iran's inarguable compliance with its commitments under the JCPOA, which has consistently been confirmed not just by the International Atomic Energy Agency but also by the Secretariat, which, as can be seen from the report, has no verified proof to the contrary.

In conclusion, I would like to state that the Russian Federation remains committed to the unconditional and comprehensive implementation of the provisions of resolution 2231 (2015) and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Despite the withdrawal of the United States, the implementation of the JCPOA by all of its remaining participants is currently continuing in full.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): I thank the Security Council for inviting Germany to this discussion today. We are participating here as part of the 4+2 group that negotiated the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and also as part of the Joint Commission that is overseeing the implementation of the JCPOA.

I would like to echo others' thanks for the briefings by Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo, the Head of the Delegation of the European Union, and our colleague the representative of the Netherlands. We are particularly grateful to Karel van Oosterom for the work that he has put into this.

We welcome the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/602) and do not believe that it is malicious. We think it is constructive, and that its concentration on annex B is legitimate. I also support the proposal that perhaps next time around it should focus more on annex A, but I think it is legitimate that while looking at the overall picture, the report should concentrate on annex B, because we believe that there are serious things to report in that regard.

But before I come to annex B, I would also like to address generally the question of the JCPOA, endorsed by resolution 2231 (2015). On that topic I can be brief. Indeed, I can only echo the words of everybody around the table, with one exception, and that is that they all support the JCPOA and regret that the United States has left it. We believe that the JCPOA builds on and strengthens the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. It prevents a potential nuclear arms race in the region. It is essential for our national and European security that there not be nuclear proliferation or a nuclear arms race in the region. We believe that the

European security situation has become worse. We also believe that leaving the JCPOA undermines effective multilateralism and the rules-based international order, of which the nuclear-non-proliferation regime is a very important pillar. It is therefore clear to us that Germany, together with its European partners, will remain committed to the JCPOA as long as Iran is in compliance, and we urge Iran to abide by all the nuclear-related restrictions that it is committed to under the JCPOA. The latest report of the International Atomic Energy Agency has just confirmed that it has been doing so.

I will now to turn to annex B. In our view, its full and effective implementation is very important for the maintenance of regional and international security. We encourage everyone to ensure respect for annex B and compliance with it. The findings of the Secretary-General on arms transfers and ballistic-missile activities, which are documented in the report, give rise to serious concerns. In that regard, we are particularly concerned about the missile attacks on Saudi Arabia, Iran's non-compliance with the arms embargo against Yemen and the transfer to Yemen of ballistic-missile technology. The report also points to Iranian arms deliveries in the Middle East. We call on Iran to put a stop to all of this, as such actions violate binding provisions of annex B of resolution 2231 (2015).

Germany is also deeply concerned about the development of Iran's ballistic-missile programme, and we call on Iran to end the programme and all testing. Iran's arms-transfer and missile-programme activities in the region are destabilizing and have negative effects for European security. Instead of investing in violations of resolution 2231 (2015), we again appeal to Iran to invest in building trust in the region and in abiding by the resolution.

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.